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THREE DISCOURSES

ON THE

RELIGION OF REASON.

BY

GERRIT SMITH.

UNCHANGED FROM THEIR ORIGINAL PUBLICATION.

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THE RELIGION OF REASON.

A DISCOURSE BY GERRIT SMITH.

IN PETERBORO, FEB. 21ST, 1858.

WORD has gone out that I am this day to present a new religion: and hence no doubt this unusually large assembly. It is indeed a new religion that I am to present; and yet it is an old one. It is old, and yet it is new. It is the same religion which was preached and lived by Jesus Christ more than eighteen centuries ago. It is the same "faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Thus old is this religion: and yet so little is it preached and apprehended, that it well deserves to be called a new one.

I see, my neighbors, that you are disappointed. You came to this place with your curiosity highly excited to hear about a new religion: and it turns out that I am to tell you of but the old one. I have put a damper upon your raised expectations by announcing for my theme the old religion of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, is it not a new religion to many of *you?* The commandment that "ye love one another," was in point of fact an old one: and yet Jesus said: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." To those whom He addressed it was new.

Do I stir the indignation of some of you by intimating that you are not accustomed to hear the religion of Jesus preached? But when and where do you hear it preached? "Every Sunday," say you. "In all the churches," say you. Well, if this is so, I confess that I am not so fortunate as you are. For very rarely do I hear it. You tell me that the clergymen of this neighborhood preach it. These are good men. I love and

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honor them: and I doubt not that they are all in the way to heaven. But if I understand them, it is not the religion of Jesus which they preach. They preach in favor of creeds and churches and a clerical order of men. So mistaken are they, as still to believe that Jesus came to establish all these:—whereas He came to send them all down stream. Blind are they still to the fact, that when His religion shall have come to prevail over the whole earth, there will not one church creed be left; no, nor one clergyman; no, nor one church in the present and popular sense of the word.

A religious creed is proper. Every man should have one. But a church creed is improper. Fifty or a hundred people in Peterboro or Cazenovia, however much alike in their views and spirit, should no more be required to adopt a common religious creed than to shorten or stretch out their bodies to a common length.

There is a sad misconception in regard to a church also. The common idea is, that to make a church people must come together and organize, much as in the case of a Mutual Insurance Company. This is the way a Sectarian church is made. But Jesus no more thought of providing for a sectarian church than for a political party. In His eye the Christians of a place are the church of the place: and this too whether they know it or not, will it or not. They are such by force of their character: and votes can neither make nor unmake the fact.

As to the clerical order. Many clergymen are among the best of men. Nevertheless such an order is wholly unauthorized and exceedingly pernicious. Their assumption of an exclusive right to teach religion makes the teachers conceited, dogmatic, arrogant, tyrannical; and their hearers lazy in mind and slavish in spirit.

The plea for a clerical order is that men learned in religion are needed to teach it. This however is a pagan idea, that has come down to us. To be able to teach a pagan religion—to explain its mysteries and superstitions and absurdities—does indeed require much study of books and much cabalistic learning. Somewhat so is it in the case of the Hebrew religion also. But the religion taught by Jesus is not a letter but a life. So simple is it that the unlearned can both understand and teach it. Even fishermen He pronounced fit to preach His religion. Ay,

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little children can comprehend it. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise," says Jesus. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," says He, "that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Wise and good men are the teachers in many theological seminaries. Emphatically true is this in the case of the one in our own county. Nevertheless a theological seminary is a mistake. This it is because the current religion is a mistake. The true religion is too simple to make the training of a theological seminary necessary for those who teach it. We should allow the wisdom and goodness of God to assure us that the religion which He has given to the world must correspond in its simplicity with the simplicity of the masses.

Let it not be supposed from what I have said, that I object to the pastorship. Every church should have at least one pastor. He may or may not however have many of the gifts of a preacher.

Every true church of Christ is a simple democracy. Such practically were the primitive churches. Its ordinary assemblies should be mere conferences in which all persons, male or female, are to feel entirely free to speak as the spirit moves them. In this wise are they capable, without having any other preachers than those of their own body, to edify the church, and to glorify God. No Christian should doubt his right to open his lips on such occasions. Faith in Christ is the warrant to speak for Christ. "I believed," says Paul, "and therefore have I spoken." But in addition to this means of grace and growth within themselves, the collective churches should have and should liberally support a powerful itinerant ministry: and this I can say without being inconsistent with what I have said of the simplicity of Christ's religion. The Pauls and Barnabases of modern times should travel among the churches, as did the Pauls and Barnabases of ancient times. The obscurest country church should be favored, as often as every month or two, with a discourse from a Finney, a Beecher, a Lucretia Mott, an Angelina Weld, a Chapin, a Parker, a Beriah Green, an Alonzo Potter, or an Abram Pryne.

But I proceed to add to my reasons for declaring that the clergymen of this neighborhood do not preach the religion of

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Jesus. They do not preach it—for they preach that salvation turns on believing in the "doctrines." I am not blaming them for teaching the divinity of Christ, the atonement, an eternal hell, and the plenary inspiration of the Bible. What I blame them for, is their teaching that they who do not understand and receive these doctrines must perish. I might admit that Jesus taught all these doctrines. But where did He teach that if a man does not understand and receive them, he shall perish? He taught that at the close of this earthly drama men are to be judged by their lives. The great decisive question then will be—not what were your doctrines, but what were your deeds? How did you acquit yourself in regard to those simple duties, opportunities for doing which crowd the whole pathway of both high and humble life, even from childhood to the grave? Did you feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger, and visit the sick and the prisoner? In perfect and beautiful consistency with these interrogatories is the Saviour's declaration: "By their fruits ye shall know them;" and also the Apostles': "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction."

False tests of character do our clerical neighbors apply in their trying of us by "the doctrines." In reference to good King Josiah, Jeremiah says: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord." Says Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And how emphatically does Jesus make the life the test when He says: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye even so to them." It is honesty, that He enjoins in these words. To be honest is to be a Christian. The most honest man on earth is the best Christian on earth. It is indeed the most comprehensive honesty, that is here required. The spirit, which dwelt in Jesus, can alone inspire it: and strangers are we to that spirit until we are born again. Radical must be the change in our fallen and depraved nature, ere a thorough and gospel honesty can characterize us. I say *fallen* nature. Let me remark that I do not entertain the common views of this subject. Owing to ancestral violations of moral as well as physical and intellectual

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laws, we inherit a constitution morally as well as physically and intellectually impaired. This is all I mean by a fallen nature, adding thereto what we may ourselves have done to degrade it.

The clergymen of our neighborhood believe and inculcate that little can be done for a man until he has become thoroughly instructed in and entirely converted to that whole form of doctrine which they regard as vital. This step taken, and his next is to conform his life to the teaching. Now I admit that the creed exerts an influence upon the life:—but it is not so great as that which the life exerts upon the creed. The creed should be left to grow out of the life rather than the life out of the creed. Let a man set out to deal more justly and lovingly with all his fellow men, and he will soon find himself forming a creed, which corresponds with his improved course of life. As his life becomes increasingly pure and beautiful, so will his creed become increasingly sound and comprehensive. In saying that the life influences the creed more than the creed the life, I am justified by the Saviour's declaration: "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine." It is mainly in doing right that we get a right creed.

But it is said that Jesus requires faith, and makes it the condition of salvation. Faith in what? In the doctrines on which our clergymen harp habitually?—I ask again—where does He teach that the want of such faith is fatal? "However this may be," reply our clergymen, "He nevertheless makes faith in Himself essential." I admit it. He says: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." But just here comes up the great question—what is it to believe in Christ? Is it to believe in "the doctrines?" If so, then the millions of good men, who had never heard of them, nor even of Christ, and the millions too of good men who, having heard of them, had nevertheless mistaken conceptions of them, have perished. But as sure as God is just and merciful, all good men, live and die they in whatever ignorance of the person of Christ or of "the doctrines," are saved. What then is it to believe in Christ? I answer that such belief in its very highest sense is faith in justice, sincerity, mercy, love, and the other moral qualities of which man, be he in Christendom or heathendom, has instinctive knowledge, and for his growth in which, be he in Christendom or

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heathendom, he is responsible. These are the qualities, which make up that sum of truth which Jesus came into our world to live to honor and die to magnify: and of which He declares Himself to be the impersonation when He says: "I am the way, the truth and the life." This is the truth of which He spake when He said to Pilate: "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." I repeat that to believe in Jesus in the very highest sense is to believe in those virtues which were all clustered in His perfect character: and moreover it is to believe in them so cordially and so constantly as to make them our own, and to prove that they are our own by their blossoms and fruits in our lives. Our lives and our likeness to Christ are the precise measure of our faith in Christ.

I am well aware how contrary to the common view of it is this view of faith in Christ. As is generally held, right apprehensions—adoring, melting thoughts—of His person and personal character constitute pre-eminently true faith in Christ. I would not undervalue such apprehensions and thoughts. He who has them not, even though the life and death of Christ are clearly before him, can give no satisfactory proof that he appreciates the truths which Christ came to teach and illustrate, and no satisfactory proof that he welcomes the duties which He came to enjoin. Nevertheless the Saviour does Himself admit that men may mistake Him and yet be safe. "Whosoever," says He, "speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him." That is, he shall not be safe who mistakes in regard to the spirit and essence—the soul and substance of religion. If men may err in regard to Christ and yet be forgiven, it nevertheless does not follow that they shall be forgiven, who live in the denial of those vital truths, which the Spirit of God teaches in every heart.

I said that our clergymen make the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Bible essential to salvation; and that in so doing they preach not the religion of Christ. But are they not also in error in respect to the fact of such inspiration?

The Bible is really the best book in the world: though the present uses of it make it practically the worst. All other books put together are, not so much as the Bible is, the occasion of

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obstructing the progress of civilization and of filling the world with ignorance and superstition. It is adapted as no other book is to enrich the mind and expand the soul. But misapprehened, misinterpreted, and perverted to the extent it is, no other book—nay no number of books—does so much to darken the mind and shrivel the soul.

The clergy make the Bible supreme authority. But our reason is under God the final judge in all questions. The Bible, instead of being used but to enlighten reason, is made to override it. Nevertheless this book, like every other book, is to be regarded as the servant of reason, and not reason as the servant of it. Reason must sit in judgment upon the Bible, as well as upon all things else:—for it is the voice of God in the soul, and nothing must ever be allowed to be exalted above it. In reply to the folly, which makes reason inferior or antagonistic to faith, we declare it to be the basis of all true faith and repugnant to no true faith. Reason, in a word, is religion; and the one duty of every man is to bring his passions and appetites and whole self into subjection to it. The most reasonable person in Peterboro is the best Christian in Peterboro. Most happily chosen is the word where Paul calls religion a *reasonable* service.

But it is said that reason is not competent to pass upon religious questions. Jesus however says it is. "Why judge ye not even of yourselves what is right?" He came to throw men back upon their own consciousness of right and wrong, and to hold them to the deductions and confessions of their own reason. And does not Paul also teach the sufficiency of reason in the first chapter of Romans, (19, 20, 21)?

It is true that the reason of most men is greatly perverted. It is true that in innumerable instances it is reduced to little better than a compound of passion and prejudice:—or, to speak with perhaps more philosophical correctness, such a compound is allowed to take the place of reason. Nevertheless reason, poor guide though we may make it, is our only legitimate guide. It may lead us to ruin. Still we are not at liberty to give it up for any other leader: no, not for church, nor pope, nor Bible. If we have debased and corrupted our reason, we alone are responsible for the wrong, and we alone must bear the loss. What was due from us when we had a right reason is equally due

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from us when we have destroyed or supplanted it. We can not cancel our obligations by our crimes.

Our acknowledgment of the absolute and supreme authority of the Bible is claimed on the ground of its inspiration. But where is the proof that it is inspired? Is it in the assertion to this end of the churches and clergy? Is it to be looked for in what are called external evidences—which by the way are to be searched after in that stream of ignorant and superstitious traditions, which has come down to our age? Oh! no. The proof of the inspiration is to be looked for alone in the pages of the Bible. If not found there, it can be found no where. Moreover, every man must, and upon his own responsibility, judge of the proof for himself.

I do myself believe that most of the writers of the Bible were inspired. All however that I mean by their inspiration is that special flowing of the divine mind into the human mind, of which they enjoy the most, who walk the closest with God. Thus blessed were prophets and apostles. Subjects of this inspiration there are in every age. The sublime pages of Paul prove that he was largely inspired. But he is not infallible. He does not claim to be.

I believe in the Bible. That is, I believe in its great unchangeable principles and everlasting truths, and in all of it which is in harmony with those principles and truths. If there are parts of it, which my reason shall ever teach me are not in such harmony, these I will reject. For these, to use a law phrase, are void for inconsistency, and are no part of the Bible.

In what I said of inspiration, I had no reference to the power to tell future events. That events were foretold by some of the writers of the Bible I can not doubt.

I said that reason has been overridden by the Bible. The vast evil consequences of it no human mind can measure. Why, for instance, is it that slavery is able to make so plausible and effective a defense of itself? It is because its defenders have been allowed to take it out of the jurisdiction of reason, and submit its claims to the Bible. So, too, war and polygamy and the drinking of intoxicating liquors and the wrongs suffered by woman have done not a little to prolong their existence by fleeing from their prompt condemnation in the court of reason to try what they can make for themselves out of certain cunning

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interpretations of the Bible. Alas! that it should ever be left to the decision of a book whether these naked and enormous crimes are or are not crimes! For what book is there that men can not read in any and every way to suit their interests? The matchless crime of slavery is instantly condemned by not only the enlightened reason of manhood but the untutored instincts of childhood. How absurd then to submit its character to the decision of pages and philology and exegesis—to the decision, which learning and ingenuity are as like to draw to the one side as to the other!

If men are so low in understanding as to need a Bible to teach them the moral character of the crimes I have enumerated, then are they too low in understanding to be helped by a Bible. Then may Bibles be made as well for donkeys and monkeys as for men.

Who is willing to be a slave? No one. And this proves that the reason of man and the whole nature of man universally condemn slavery. Hence does it prove that if there is any thing in the Bible for slavery, the Bible is so far wrong.

Again, how speedy and certain the conclusion we are brought to by experience, observation, science, study of the laws of life and health, that intoxicating liquors are unfit for a beverage! And who but a very wicked or a very stupid man will appeal from that conclusion to the Bible or to any thing else?

Who too but such a man will ever feel it necessary to go to the Bible to put polygamy on trial? Higher authority and more certain evidence than the Bible have we on this point as well as on the point of rum-drinking, The census tables in all ages and all nations dispose of the question of polygamy. They prove the equal numbers of the sexes, and confirm the declaration of Jesus that God made us "male and female"—only one woman for one man, and only one man for one woman. Whoever therefore gets a plurality of wives robs his brother; and whoever gets a plurality of husbands robs her sister;—just as the people who get two or three farms apiece have made themselves guilty of robbing the landless. By the way, our Government shrinks from putting down its foot upon polygamy where it is made a religious institution. But the province of government is to uphold the great natural rights of its subjects;—and none the less so where the violation of these rights is under the

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cover and in the name of religion. The very same obligation rests on government to suppress polygamy that rests on it to suppress land-monopoly. The very same obligation to punish the robbing men of women as to punish the robbing men of land.

Again, let the Bible say what it will of war, who in the light of reason does not condemn it as madness and murder?

And what too, if, as is held by many, Paul does teach that woman as compared with man is an inferior order of being?—who that receives such insane teaching is fit to have a wife or a daughter?

Lest what I have now said might be construed into the admission that these crimes are countenanced by the Bible, I take this occasion to affirm that no one of them finds the least shelter in the principles of that blessed book. Neither the superstitious regard for the Bible and the superstitious assumptions in its behalf on the one hand; nor the assaults, which atheism, skepticism, and ungodly rationalism make upon it on the other, can ever shake the confidence which he reposes in it, who, in the light of a true and therefore reverent reason, has studied the claims of this volume to acceptance, honor, love, and obedience.

I arraigned our clergymen for holding that the doctrine of an eternal hell must be believed in, in order to salvation. For be the doctrine true or false, I can not think that we shall be either saved or lost by any views we may entertain of it. I now arraign them for their undoubting faith in it. No warrant have they either to preach or to entertain a faith in it which is free from all doubts.

I confess—perhaps to my shame and condemnation—that I do not feel a deep and abiding interest in the next stage of our being. Far less concerned am I to know what is the future state than to know and do the duties of the present.

I believe in future punishment. It is a reasonable doctrine. It is philosophically and necessarily true. Every where our character must determine our condition. Every man on dying must go to his own place—to the place for which his character fits him. The death of his body can no more affect his character than the breaking of his spectacles or cane. His body, no more than his spectacles or cane, is a part of himself. That his character will surely remain eternally unchanged, I deny that

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any one has the right to affirm. Jude teaches that persons can fall from heaven. Why then may they not rise from hell? For aught we can certainly know, there may be room in the life to come for repentance as well as apostasy. In one sense of "everlasting punishment," I am an undoubting believer in it:—for I can not doubt that the punishment of the sinner will be as everlasting as his sin.

Whilst I confess that I have no certain apprehensions of the kind or degree or continuance of either future punishment or future enjoyment; I nevertheless confidently maintain that enough knowledge for me and for all men on this point is that in the life to come "it shall be well" with the righteous and "ill" with the wicked; and that the "Judge of all the earth will do right," as well there as here. Whilst earth is our home, let us discharge with alacrity and delight the duties of earth. In that way, and in that way only, shall we be fitted for heaven. In that way, and in that way only, shall we get to heaven.

I spoke of the future as a place. I had perhaps better call it a state. That there are millions of heavens and millions of hells—that they are in short as numerous as are the differences in moral character—better answers my conception.

I blamed the clergy for holding that they must perish who subscribe not to the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. For be the doctrine true or false, there is no right to attribute such consequences to its rejection. I also blame them for refusing to admit even the smallest doubt of the truth of the doctrine. In the mind of every man who allows his reason free play there is certainly room for such a doubt. But whether Christ is God or man I leave to be discussed by those who have a taste for speculative discussions. It suffices me to see in Him the infallible teacher of religious truth, the perfect representative and the fullest and most winning expression of His Father. I welcome Him as "God manifest in the flesh." My largest conceptions of wisdom, justice, love are more than realized in Him: and it is my largest conceptions of these and other attributes of Deity, that make up the Deity I love and honor. Surely, if Lady Guion may say: "The providences of God are God," I may say: *The attributes of God are God.*

The mission of Christ to the world was to give all needed extension to the acquaintance of man with God. The heavens

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above and the earth beneath; the instructive course of providence; and the more instructive teachings of the Spirit were insufficient to this end without the manifestation of God in Christ. Is it said that His mission was to die for the world? I answer that His death was incidental to His faithful exhibition of His Father's character. It was because He was like God that He was crucified.

The one thing else for which I blamed our clergymen was their making faith in the doctrine of the atonement essential to salvation. But are they not also blameworthy for making themselves so perfectly and stubbornly certain of the truth of the doctrine?

I am not disposed to controvert the doctrine. In my eye there is none of that absurdity in it, which is so freely imputed to it. For aught I see, it might have been decreed in the counsels of heaven, that a being of Christ's superior dignity must die for man in order that the claims of the law be satisfied; in order that God "might be just, and the justifier" of man.

But although I make no opposition to the doctrine, nor even object to being numbered with those who subscribe to it, I nevertheless can not feel, as do many, that it is true beyond all possible question. Moreover, I can not see why I should love and honor Christ any the less, if it shall turn out that the law, instead of being satisfied by the righteousness of Christ, is satisfied by the righteousness, which His spirit has wrought in them who love him. That Christ lived and suffered and died for men is abundant reason for their giving Him all possible love and honor, without their stopping to calculate what they have gained by Him. Moreover, it is the privilege of every good man to know that the claims of the law against himself are satisfied. The fact that he is good—that he loves God and man—is the highest possible proof he can have that they are satisfied. Paul closes his enumeration of virtues with the declaration: "Against such there is no law." No more can there be law against him who is adorned with these virtues. Admitting the doctrine of the atonement to be certainly and entirely true, nevertheless the importance of our understanding and believing it is greatly overrated. But the importance of our believing that Jesus lived, and suffered, and died for man is in no danger of being overrated:—for, thus believing and understand-

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ing, our hearts are drawn out in love to Him, and to the truth, and to our fellow-men, and to our Father. This is the needed effect upon us of the Advent. But on what precise principles it is, and whether by any of the supposed expedients or technicalities that our accounts in the books of heaven are balanced, is a matter we may safely leave among "the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God."

Again, I can not, because Paul seems to inculcate the doctrine of the Atonement, feel entirely certain that it is true. He says but little of it except in his letter to the Jews:—and in what he says of it to them, he is perhaps more swayed by his and their common education than by any revelations or inspirations. We must not forget that the Jewish education was full of atoning sacrifices. From early childhood the Jew was taught to believe that the animal killed in sacrifice atoned for the sins of an individual or a family. How natural then was it for Paul to speak to his countrymen of Jesus, who did indeed die for the world as One who had atoned for the sins of the world! Thus natural was it for John to say, as he looked upon Jesus: "Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" He virtually said: "Behold not the literal lamb which taketh away the sin of but an individual or a family: but behold the figurative lamb—the lamb of God—which taketh away the sin of the world!" If the atonement of Christ is but a mere fancy, it is nevertheless not strange that a Jew should entertain it. So fully possessed was he of the idea of atonement, that it must have been very easy for him to fancy a sufferer for another to be an atoning sufferer.

I do not forget that the animal sacrifices are what is most relied on to prove the truth of the doctrine of the atonement. Those sacrifices do indeed seem to be meet offerings to a cruel, bloody pagan God. Moreover, according to Paul (Heb. 10: 6) Jesus testified that His Father had "had no pleasure" in them; and according to Jeremiah (7: 22) God Himself declared that He "commanded them" not. Still it must be confessed that there is a vast amount of evidence in the Bible that God did command these sacrifices. If however we must yield to this evidence, it nevertheless remains to be proved that they are types of the sacrifice in which the Lord Jesus offered up Himself. May not a man be good and yet doubt the sufficiency of the

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proof to this end? One thing more under this head. Instead of the vulgar view of the atonement, may not Christ be regarded as in effect an atoning sacrifice because He saves men from the penalty of the law by the converting influences, which flow out upon them from his life and death?

But I will weary you no further with words about "the doctrines." My neighbors, we are all aware that a low place in the ecclesiastical world is assigned to Peterboro. For many, many years, we have been giving great offense to the clergy and the churches. And yet, I must think, that this little village—probably the only spot in the State to which the Anti-Slavery Society, that was mobbed out of Utica nearly a quarter of a century ago, could retreat in safety—is, in respect to a sound and rational religion, greatly in advance of almost every other place in the land. Our families with certainly very few exceptions dwell together in peace and love; and in this there is no little proof that the religion of Jesus prevails among us. No little proof also of this is there in the fact that a great many years have passed away since intoxicating drinks were openly sold among us: and no little proof too in the fact that the filthy vice of snuffing, chewing, and smoking tobacco is held by a large share of our people to be disgraceful and sinful. And where I ask most emphatically is there a place in all our broad land so free as this from the spirit of caste? Whose table is there here to which a black man is not as welcome as a white one? When I heard the other day that our respectable youth of white faces and black faces had mingled together freely in a public dance, I confess (although I am not the advocate of public as I am of private dances) that I felt proud of my village. Where else in our country has the religion of Jesus achieved a conquest so beautiful, so decisive, and so much needed? Ignorant and unsound as we are held to be in regard to "the doctrines," nevertheless are we not quite as far advanced in humanity and practical Christianity as the places where every hair's breadth of the most orthodox interpretation of doctrines is contended for?

There is a wide-spread revival of religion in our country. Of what religion time alone can surely tell. It is not Christianity, if it shall allow the rich to stand aloof from the poor, and the people of one complexion to refuse to associate with the

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people of another. It is not Christianity, if it is like the current religion. For the terms which this religion keeps with slavery and with the murderous prejudice against the colored races proves it to be a spurious and Satanic religion. Why, the very first lesson in the school of Christ is to know our brother and sister, and to see Christ in every man, woman, and child, be they rich or poor, white, red, or black. The religion, which does not go to bind together all human hearts is not the religion of the Saviour. A poor opinion of this revival shall I have, if there shall still be as much opposition as ever to negro suffrage; and as great unwillingness as ever to mingle complexions in the school and church; and as great readiness as ever to cast votes for pro-slavery men.

Another delightful evidence to my mind that the spirit of Christ has wrought great and blessed changes in Peterboro is to be found in the breaking up of our sectarian churhes and in the general and growing dislike to sectarianism. God hasten the day when, here and elsewhere, there shall no longer be Christians, who shall not be deeply ashamed to be called Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, or to pass under any other religious party name!

But were I to go on and speak all the praises of Peterboro, I should still be obliged to confess that she is very far from perfect; that there is still much in her to be reformed; and that she greatly needs the priceless blessing of a revival of true religion. Never will our village be what it should be, until love shall reign in all our families and all our hearts; until an altar to God shall be erected in all our homes; and holiness to the Lord be inscribed upon all our business and all our amusements.

My hearers, the great struggle between the religion of authority and the religion of reason has begun. It did not begin with Martin Luther and the early Protestants. They were still creed-bound; and their enslavement to the Bible differed not essentially from enslavement to the Church. This struggle is chiefly the growth of the last half-century; and in America nothing has contributed to it so much as the Temperance and Anti-slavery reforms—since nothing so much as these has awakened a sense of human dignity and human rights, and called for a common-sense and practical religion. The Protestants are wont to disparage the Catholics. Nevertheless the mass of the

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Protestants are with the Catholics in favor of a religion of authority and against the religion of reason. At this point they are essentially alike. For what submission is there to the Catholic Church which is more degrading or dwarfing than that which Protestants are so inexorably required to yield to the ecclesiastical interpretations of the Bible?

We are living in an age of great progress—great progress in the material, mental, and moral world. Every thing is going forward and improving except ecclesiastical religion. That remains stereotyped and unchangeable. But we thank God for the abounding evidence that it will ere long give place to another and better religion. Already are there dawnings of that glad day when the superstitions and absurdities, which have so long debased and tormented men, shall have passed away forever; and when Christianity in all her reasonableness and righteousness shall overspread the whole earth.

Alas! how little has been accomplished by these superstitions and absurdities for the glory of God and the good of man! War, slavery, land-monopoly, polygamy, drunkenness, the wrongs of woman still remain. The religion of reason—that religion which says to man, "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" had long ago done away with these evils, and turned this sin-smitten, priest-ridden, superstition-bound world into a paradise.

It is often said that we, who are busy in reducing religion to reason, are busy, at least in effect, to overthrow it. But to bring religion into identity with reason is not to degrade but to exalt it. And again, it is not we who endanger religion, but they who reduce it to a superstition. There is indeed danger that men will break loose from the Bible. But this danger springs mainly from the fact that rapidly increasing multitudes will no longer consent to bow their necks to a religion of authority and receive the Bible because it is the Bible rather than because their reason has indorsed it. If this book shall be cast aside as a superstition, it will be because its friends are unwilling that reason and reason only shall pass upon it and interpret it. The truth is that the civilization of Christendom is fast outgrowing the religion of Christendom:—and this is because reason is allowed to infuse itself more and more freely into civilization, whilst it is still driven away from the precincts of religion.

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No where probably are the people more ready than they are in Italy to reject the current Christianity. And this because no where is the current Christianity more emphatically a bundle of superstitions, and because no where is it more industriously and superstitiously urged upon the superstition of the people. As an additional reason, no where else are the people opening their eyes faster to the religious impositions practised upon themselves. In a word, Italy has outgrown her religion. Her limbs have become too big for her garments. Italian civilization is far in advance of Italian Christianity.

My hearers, who among you will to-day espouse this religion of reason—this manly and common-sense religion of the lips and life of Jesus? You had been told by great sticklers for doctrines, that a very accommodating religion would be presented to you on this occasion—a sort of heaven-made-easy religion. I beg you to make trial of the religion, which I have now presented to you. Try to bring your entire self under the reign of reason; and then you will know that your task is not an easy one. Then you will know that only he who is born again is adequate to it. Then you will know that only he who has been imbued with the spirit of Christ, and has chosen Christ for his master and Saviour, is capable of submitting his whole being to the demands of reason. Let me not however be misunderstood. Notwithstanding what I have just said, this religion which I commend to you is not a hard one. It is hard to get. But when once gotten it is easy. When by the grace and help of God the yoke of Christ is once upon your neck, you will find it easy, and His burden light.

We who inculcate this religion of reason must lay our account with great opposition, not to say virulent persecution. Because we can not "frame to pronounce" the Shibboleth of the churches and clergy we are called infidels. It is the bad fashion of the age—it has been the bad fashion of every age—to apply doctrinal tests of character, instead of judging men "by their fruits." But never is it reasonable or Christian to go back of the life to judge of the character. To do so is to be guilty of wicked intolerance. If we regard our neighbor's doctrines as unsound, and are nevertheless constrained to acknowledge his pure and loving and beautiful and reverent life, then instead of condemning him for his unsound doctrines, we are

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to do him double honor for that goodness of his heart, which maintains itself in the face of the errors of his understanding: and, what is more, we are to thank God for consenting to dwell by His spirit in a heart, which is coupled with a wrong head.

I close with reminding my fellow-laborers, that as we are now embarked in the most difficult of all reforms, we are under especial need of remembering Him whose name is "Strength." Dismayed and overcome we surely shall be, unless our hearts go out constantly for His support. When a quarter of a century ago, we had to encounter a very strong anti-temperance and pro-slavery public sentiment, we had fainted unless we had made the Lord God our help. But then the churches were divided and the clergy also. No very small share of them were with us. Far different is it now when we have to breast the well nigh entirely undivided forces of both churches and clergy, and all that appalling public sentiment, which such forces are able to generate. In our determination to resist the mad intolerance, which judges character by those ever harped-on doctrines about which even among the best of men there will ever be as many minds as there are differences of temperament and education; and in our determination to acknowledge no other test of character than the life, we may be sure that we shall not fail to provoke such an array against ourselves, as will be utterly overwhelming, if we put not our trust in the living God. Brave then let us be to meet the frowns of our fellows: but all the while let us be meek and humble in the consciousness that our bravery will die, and our cause be defeated, unless we keep our hearts in contact with the Divine heart, and draw from thence the courage and strength, which that great heart can alone supply.

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THE RELIGION OF REASON.

A DISCOURSE BY GERRIT SMITH.

IN PETERBORO, JAN. 23, 1859.

A YEAR ago I gave you a discourse in favor of the religion of reason. To-day I give you another. That discourse, wherever it circulated, was severely criticised, and this will probably experience no more tender treatment than did that.

Were men but mere machines, they could reflect but little honor on their Maker. It is because they are free agents—free to choose to know God, and free to be ignorant of Him—free to grow either in likeness or unlikeness to Him—that they are capable of doing Him large honor. That day, if it shall ever come, in which all the intelligent creatures of His universe shall choose this divine knowledge, will realize our present conceptions of the highest possible glorification of God. For the power of this knowledge is to produce in all who choose it likeness to Him: and likeness to Him is the greatest honor that can be rendered to Him. Indeed, so far as we can see, is not the making of this likeness perfect and universal, the one work of God and of all who through His renovating grace become "workers together with Him?" The prophet says: "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." A beautiful fancy connected with these words is that as the silversmith has sufficiently purified the metal when it is brought to reflect his face perfectly, so God will be satisfied with the progress of a human character when He shall see in it his own.

As, then, our likeness to God is the highest honor we are capable of yielding Him, so, to grow in this likeness, should be

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our incessant and absorbing aim. That it is also our own highest enjoyment is manifest. Though of this we are to make comparatively trivial account. Since there is no other way in which we can so unequivocally and fully testify our regard for our earthly friend, as in studying his character, and copying his virtues, so the best praise we can offer God is that likeness to Him which results from our deep interest in his character through our knowledge and love of it.

That the one great duty of life is to grow in resemblance to God, was deeply felt by the Psalmist, when he exclaimed: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." Nor less deeply was it felt by the Apostle, when prompted to say: "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him."

The law of our assimilation to the ruling interests of our hearts operates no less surely and rapidly in upward than in downward directions. All see how certain and swift is the miser's process for shrivelling his soul. All see that the sensualist sinks his whole nature to the level of his sensuality. All see that the character of the ambitious man derives its color and cast from no higher objects than those which come within the range of his ambition. But no less true is it that he who makes God his study and desire becomes godlike. He discerns, comprehends and conforms to the divine principles. Thankfully and joyfully does he fall in with the divine methods and arrangements. Habitually and impressively does his life reflect much of the divine wisdom and beauty. Thus does he go forward, fulfilling the one grand purpose of his existence—assimilation to his heavenly Father—until, at length, his heart freed from all evil, and his intellect emerged from all darkness, he stands like the Angel of the Apocalypse in the very sun.

That likeness to God results from knowing Him, is taught by the Apostle when he says: "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." To know God is to love Him; and we can not love Him without being like Him. How, then, we can best study the Divine character to the end that our own shall most resemble it, is the great problem which every man is to solve, and with the practical solutions of which he is to make beautiful and blessed every day of his life.

The sun, moon and stars, and the globe we inhabit, are all witnesses for God. Innumerable other sources are there which

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flow with divine knowledge. The whole course of providence testifies that God is strong and wise and good. Very emphatic is such testimony through those men and women who, here and there in all ages, have by their large partaking and faithful illustration of the Divine Spirit taught the world the character and excellence of that Spirit. Prophets there have been whose mighty words and sublime lives were rich manifestations of God. High above them all is his "beloved Son," Jesus, "full of grace and truth," Jesus, "filled with all the fullness of God," Jesus, such an incarnation of the divine wisdom and goodness and loveliness, such a matchless exhibition of the divine character as made it no exaggeration in the Apostle to call him "God manifest in the flesh." "Looking unto Jesus," unto this brightest and fullest expression of God, is preëminently the means for increasing in the knowledge, love and likeness of God.

Thus abundant are the means for acquainting ourselves with God. We can not remain ignorant of Him if we are disposed to study Him. We may know Him, if we will, and as we have already said, to know Him is to love Him and be like Him. The diligent and honest student can learn "by the things that are made," what is that perfect law that converts the soul. But in the words and lives of prophets, and above all in the words and life of Jesus, he can learn it more surely, comprehensively, and accurately.

Such are the circumstances of men. Now, which in these circumstances is the religion best adapted to promote their likeness to God? There are but two religions in the world. One is that of nature or reason; and the ten thousand varieties of the other all come properly under the name of the conventional or doctrinal religion.

I made preëminent the "looking unto Jesus." I might with truth have said that it surpasses the sum total of all other means for producing likeness to God. But alas! the religious world, instead of "looking unto Jesus," is chiefly busy with the doctrinal systems and questions which sectaries and creed-mongers have coupled with his name! Immeasurably more important do they count it to have orthodox views in regard to the trinity, the atonement, and the future life, than to imbibe the spirit of Christ and to submit all the relations and departments and duties of life to the sway of his principles.

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The prevalent idea is that Jesus introduced a new religion, and made essential to salvation faith in his Godship, the atonement, and in other doctrines peculiar to that religion. But he did not.

The religion which Jesus so perfectly illustrated with his lips and life was no other than the religion of reason—that one and only true religion which is adapted to all ages and all peoples, and which stands opposed to all those fabrications of the cunning, and all those superstitions of the credulous, which are called religion. These fabrications and superstitions, and, in short, every other religion than that of reason, Jesus confronted. No cabalism or mysticism found any favor with him. The religion he taught was so obviously true as to make its appeal to natural sense and universal intuition. So simple was it that he found no occasion for sending men to books and priests to acquire an understanding of it. On the contrary, he put them upon their own convictions for the solution of its problems, and asked them: "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" He found reason outraged by monstrous claims in the name of religion: and the one work of his ministry—the one work which, amid all the storms of passion and prejudice and bigotry he pursued so unfalteringly and calmly and sublimely —was to reëstablish the dominion of reason. He found common-sense reduced to a ruinous discount by its concessions to religious tricks and fooleries; and he undertook to restore it to par. Such was then and is now the whole of the religion of Jesus. It is a common-sense religion. Wide as is its realm, it is but commensurate with common-sense, and one with it. To bring the whole man and the whole life under the reign of reason is its sole office. The true religion is nothing more nor less than a "reasonable service;" and wherever there is the most reasonable man, there is the most truly religious man.

We denied that Jesus made faith in certain doctrines essential to salvation. Nor is it true that he made faith in his literal self thus essential. What he means by faith in himself is faith in the Christ principle and Christ character. Hence, salvation may come to him who has never heard of Christ. Cordially to believe in that principle of divine goodness, and truly to possess the character which grows out of this cordial belief, is the sufficient, ay, and the sole salvation.

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The church and priesthood will nevertheless long continue to hold that this faith in doctrines is essential. For, beside the force of habit in the case, they will hardly be insensible to the fact that their surrender of the necessity of this faith would involve the surrender of themselves. When the true religion shall prevail, and men shall be judged by their life and character rather than by their adoption or rejection of creeds, the church, in the common-sense of the word, will have disappeared, and the priesthood have lost its vocation. When there shall be no more battles to fight concerning the doctrines, there will be no more occasion for sectarian churches; and when religion shall require only a good life and a good character, the learning peculiar to a priest will be as superfluous for the cure of souls as is that of a geologist to teach the farmer how to hold his plow, or that of a lawyer to negotiate the simple exchange of a bushel of wheat for a piece of meat. Every other religion must have its priesthood, for a scholastic training is necessary to unravel its knots. Every other religion must have an order of men capable of exploring its mysteries. But in the religion of Jesus there are no knots and no mysteries. I admit that both heaven and earth are full of mysteries. Paul, in writing to Timothy, refers to some of them. But I deny that any of them come within the range of the true religion. All its essential teachings are intelligible to common-sense. Nay, simple love is the fulfilling of its whole law. Hence, this religion needs no priesthood, unless it be that "royal priesthood" in which there are no grades, and to which every disciple, however learned or unlearned, belongs. How different this religion, the disciples of which are each his own priest, from those religions which require a sacerdotal caste to study their volumes, their legendary and mystic lore! How different from those religions which require a class of magicians because the religions themselves are magic!

Nothing can be more absurd than to make faith in the doctrines the pivot of salvation. For this is to make such faith the test of character, since it must turn exclusively upon our character whether we are saved or lost. But such faith is not absolutely subject to our control, and therefore can not be a test of character. To the unqualified proposition that men can not, and are not, bound to govern their beliefs, I confess I do not

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assent. Every man is bound to believe that goodness is goodness, and wickedness is wickedness—for this he can do if his moral affections are right, and it is in his power to have them right. But when the question is one of the understanding rather than of the heart, then owing to constitutional or educational differences, one man will believe and another disbelieve; one man will come to one conclusion, and another to another. Hence, while a person must not be excused for saying he can not believe it wrong to lie and steal, he may be for not seeing sufficient evidence to warrant the popular view of the atonement and of the Trinity. Unbelief in the one case is necessarily connected with a wicked heart. In the other, it may exist in connection with the holiest heart.

The conventional or doctrinal religion is not adapted to make men good. It teaches that we must believe the doctrines in order to be good, and that it is illegitimate and vain to seek to become good in any other way. Hence, they who receive this teaching, instead of trying to be good, try to believe the doctrines. Hence, too, they are not expected to be good, and do not themselves expect to be good until they have believed them. Again, many may never be able to believe them: and again, many give abundant proof in their lives that the doctrines may be believed without making the believer good. Moreover, whatever the goodness of those who are so strenuous for the doctrines, there is generally coupled with their strenuousness the uncharitable condemnation of all who are unable to believe them; and this intolerance is, to say the least, a great blemish and drawback upon their type of goodness. Only here and there is it that the goodness of these excessively doctrinal religionists rises above this intolerance.

Absurd, indeed, is it to require men, on peril of perdition, to subscribe to certain explanations of certain facts in religion. The fact that Christ died for us, all agree to. But it is held that we are as much bound, and that it is as important, to agree to certain speculations about it, and to certain systems of faith built upon it, as to the fact itself. Again, we are agreed that Christ spoke the words of his Father. But it is held that we must perish unless we can bring ourselves to the conclusion that he was, in respect to all the essential attributes of Deity, one with his Father. The fact, too, that we shall in

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the next life find it well with the righteous and ill with the wicked, and that all should cherish a deep and abiding sense of their accountability, is denied by none of us. But in vain, too, is all this, unless we subscribe to certain views of heaven and hell.

As well may it be said that a man must not plow, nor sow, nor reap, until he can understand how his crops grow, as that he must not enter upon a religious life and expect to be good until he can comprehend the doctrines and philosophy of religion. At many points in them the most learned, wise, and holy differ widely. The masses, of course, do. Indeed, it is not expected that they should comprehend these things. Their faith in them, as all honest theologians will readily admit, is not expected to be comprehensive and intelligent, but only narrow, superstitious, blind.

I have not been arguing that the prevalent doctrines and philosophy of religion are false and worthless. There is much of truth and value in them. All I insist on is that the importance of a full and precise knowledge of them is overrated; and that mistakes in regard to them are not necessarily fatal. For instance, a man may be good, and yet not see that he who "*increased* in wisdom and in favor with God," and who "*learned* by the things he suffered," and who confessed his *ignorance* of the times of future events, is the all-wise and unchangeable God. A man may be good, though he can not see the reasonableness of the theory of the twofold nature of Christ, and consequently can not be able to reconcile with absolute divine perfection, either this want or this growth of knowledge. Again, a man may conceive that God can delegate to Jesus or another agent power enough to enable him to build a world; and he may acquiesce even in the giving of the name of God to him who wields this great power of God. Nevertheless he may shrink from admitting the agent to be the very God. So, too, he may feel it proper to worship Christ, although unconvinced that Christ is the one God. For he may hold that truth, wherever it is, is worthy to be worshipped; and that in Christ is its perfect personification. Now, I do not say that this man is right in all, or even in any of this. But I do say that however wrong he may be in it, he may nevertheless be good. Another thing I would say is, a man may be good, and yet not fall in

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with all the popular views of the atonement. He may see that suffering one for another, even to the laying down of life, is altogether reasonable. But that God should be angry with his children, and should require an innocent victim to appease his wrath, may strike him as an exceedingly unreasonable part of the ecclesiastical machinery. It may strike him as turning the loving Father into a bloody pagan deity. A man may be good, and yet believe that the hearty repentance of the sinner is of itself sufficient ground for his forgiveness. He may even believe that Jesus teaches this in the parable of the prodigal son.

That the early Christians interpreted the atonement as a majority of modern Christians do, is perhaps true; for such interpretation would be a very natural outgrowth of Jewish education. Beautiful and impressive to the Jew must have been the analogy, however real or fanciful, between the literal sacrifice and Christ—between the lamb slain for the sin of an individual or a family, and "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." The argument for receiving and relying on Christ derived from this analogy must have been very imposing to the Jewish mind.

But it is said that all this philosophy, and all these doctrines, were taught by Jesus. If they were, it does not follow that our misapprehensions of them would make our salvation impossible. But how can we be sure that they were all taught by him? The Bible can not make us entirely sure of it. For it is, at the most, a record of but the substance of what Jesus spoke—certainly not always of his precise words. He did not write them. Nor were they written as they fell from his lips; nor probably until many years after. Hence, we may not have so much as the substance of what he said in every recorded instance. The idea that the authors of their respective parts of the Bible were moved by God to write, word by word, and that, by a perpetual miracle, every word has been preserved from all possible change in itself and in its connections, is quite too superstitious and absurd to be entertained by any reasonable mind. Another fact of great account in interpreting the Bible is, that Jesus was a poet, and that few poets have ever spoken so figuratively and hyperbolically. They who mistake his picture-language for words of philosophical precision will be liable to construe him very absurdly. Let me not be taken as under-

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rating Jesus by calling him a poet. The poet is the superior being. He deals with the essence and soul of things—common minds with but their body and phenomena.

But to return to the chief duty inculcated in this discourse—growing in likeness to God. In saying that this is to be attained by "looking unto Jesus," I did not mean that superstitious looking, which expects in return the magic transformation of the looker, but that rational looking to his principles, virtues, spirit, life, which is accompanied by the deepest yearnings of the soul to make them all our own. It is in this wise that we become like Christ; and likeness to Christ is likeness to God. For notwithstanding his repeated acknowledgment of inferiority to the Father, he claimed that he is one with Him. If he is not the Father, nevertheless he has the spirit of the Father. That he is not the Father otherwise than in spirit and character, is, perhaps, inferable from his prayer that his disciples may become one even as he and the Father are one. But the oneness of his disciples can be no further than in spirit and character.

How insulting to God and degrading to man is this sacred sorcery which is put in the place of the religion of reason! How false every view of the new birth, (which I admit whoever is saved must experience,) that makes it either more or less than a new character! How foolish and fanatical every expectation of a salvation, which does not consist and prove itself in a new and good life! But that a new character and a new and good life are not what the mass of religionists understand by the salvation of which they profess themselves to be subjects, is manifest from the fact that in character and life they are undistinguishable from others. They are no less enslaved to party than are others; and such enslavement is among the very strongest proofs that the subject of it moves upon a low plane of being, and is unfitted for a higher. It has often occurred to me that as the palæontologist has his Silurian and Old Red Sandstone periods, his Carboniferous and other formations in which to pursue his study of fossil plants and animals, so they, who thousands of centuries hence shall write the history of man, will also break up the past into large divisions. Instead of the petty distinction of a Greek or Roman age, they will grasp under one name ten thousand and twice ten thousand years. What name will they give to our times? What

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else can it be than the age of party? It promises to be a long age. It has already run through several thousand years; and judging from the present sway of party, there is a much longer race before it. How the palæontologists gloat over their discoveries! But far greater will be the joy of these historians when, in digging for their fossils, they shall strike upon such a rich specimen of party architects and party magicians as a Van Buren, a Buchanan, or a Douglas! or upon an eminent Presbyterian or Methodist, or other sectarian leader!

Hasten, O God, the coming of the age of individualism! that age in which men shall scorn to work for party, and to be helped by party; in which they shall identify themselves with all mankind and work for all mankind, and aspire to no better lot in life than their individual merits under Heaven's blessing can earn for them!

I said that our religionists are generally the slaves of party. Ask them, for instance, to help you put a stop to sectarianism; to help you overcome that monster who drags down and dwarfs so large a share of the whole human family—and you ask in vain. They prefer adhering to their religious parties, and remaining in their Baptist, Episcopal and other sectarian inclosures, to identifying themselves with all the friends of righteousness. In a word, they prefer gratifying a narrow and party spirit, to cultivating one that is broad and catholic. Entreat them to help you elect law-makers who will shut the dram-shop, and thereby dry the tears of tens of thousands of wives and mothers, and make murder, and the blasphemies of drunken lips and other great crimes, comparatively rare, and in the face of your entreaties they will cling to their political party, and vote for rum-drinkers and rum-sellers, and rum-makers. Or if you entreat them to take pity on the fugitive slave, and wield their political power against kidnappers, you will find how much stronger is their attachment to party than to freedom and justice and mercy; and how much more ready they are in this case, as well as in others, to go with the majority against Christ, than with the minority for him. These who are doctrinal rather than Christlike Christians, have a great horror of minorities. Their professed Master, when hanging on the cross, and deserted by all His disciples, was reduced to a minority of one. But these doctrinal Christians have no taste for this lonely condi-

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tion. Indeed they will steer as wide as possible of all minorities, and for the surest majority. Christians bent on being in the majority! What a solecism! The Bible says: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." It might say more. In this world of abounding wickedness, the multitude can not be followed without doing evil.

What a sad exhibition of party spirit among professing Christians was there at the last election! The religious press and the temperance press called on the people to vote for candidates who were willing to let the dram-shop continue its work of death, and the kidnapper prowl after his prey through the whole length and breadth of our State! I recollect that one of the religious newspapers made an especial and very urgent call on *praying* men to vote for them. The excuse of the religious conscience for voting for such candidates is, that they can be elected, and that candidates who stand up for God and humanity can not be! Will Christians never learn that, instead of voting for candidates who are on the side of wrong, they are bound to do all they honestly can to cripple the power and reduce the influence of such candidates! Have I a bad neighbor? Then it should be as much my object to contract the sphere of his injuriousness, as to enlarge my good neighbor's sphere of usefulness. All this is obvious in the light of a reasonable religion. But alas! the current religion is divorced from reason!

A sad spectacle, indeed, was that to which I have referred. So far as our State was concerned, all interest in freedom and temperance had nearly died out. Their professed friends had, with very few exceptions, gone into the political parties. They were no longer professing to abolish Slavery; but they were contenting themselves with idle talk against its extension. They no longer proposed to shut up the dram-shop; and though they did not altogether cease to speak for temperance, yet were the words of most of them vague and heartless, and more fitted, and doubtless more intended to veil their apostasy, and mitigate their consciousness of it than to accomplish any good for the great reform. In these circumstances a handful aroused themselves to save, if possible, these precious causes from utter extinction. They taxed themselves heavily to hire halls and presses in which to make their appeals to their old fellow-laborers. But all in vain. The dram-shop and kidnapping were

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never before so triumphant. The Christianity of the State took the side of these *institutions*. It went exultingly with the sweeping majority, and laughed at and despised the little minority. But, thanks to God, such a Christianity is a counterfeit. If it were not, then would the real Christianity be as poor and detestable a religion as was ever imposed on human credulity.

I referred to the fact that these professed friends of temperance, even while stabbing it to the heart, had the effrontery to talk for it. They talk for it still; as much since the election as they did before it. They hold meetings and resolve in favor of the suppression by Government of the sale of intoxicating drinks. All this, too, with as much of an air of sincerity and solemnity as if their votes had always corresponded with those talks and resolves.

I confess my alarm at these things. For, manifestly, this machinery of Temperance Societies and Temperance Agencies, by which these cunning men have served party purposes at the expense of corrupting the great body of temperance men and ruining the cause of temperance, is to be kept up. And, what is more, these cunning men, who study and understand the public mind, would not have dared to persevere in their impositions upon it, had they not been persuaded of its boundless credulity and deep degradation. How, for instance, could a gentleman, who spent his time last Fall in electioneering for a rum ticket, and in decrying the soundness on temperance of the temperance ticket, be bold enough to go from town to town in our county with his proposition for shutting up the dram-shop, unless he had first convinced himself, that the people are as ready to be duped as he is to dupe them?

Whence comes it that these professedly religious men can behave so unreasonably and wickedly in an election? It is largely owing to the fact that they are misled by their religion. Among them are good men, who are really better than their religion—their *adopted* religion—for no man is better than his real religion. But in the case of all of them religion has been taken on trust; and is, therefore, an unreasoned and unreasonable thing, instead of being the precious product of their free and sovereign reason. Such persons are for the most part, enslaved to the Church instead of being "the Lord's freemen;" idolaters of the Bible rather than worshippers of God. Whither the

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Church leads they almost universally follow. What its authorized expounders of the Bible say is the Bible, is sufficient to satisfy their conscience.

Every man's religion, to be worth any thing to him, must stand in his own judgment. By his own judgment must his life be regulated. The one standard by which he is to try his religion must be within and not without him. To that standard must he bring the Church—yes, and the Bible also. Gladly must he let them inform his judgment; but he must never let them over-ride it. Even the Bible was made for man, not man for the Bible. Even the Bible is the servant, and not the master, of human reason. I must receive nothing at the expense of my reason. To honor it, is at all times my highest religious duty. For reason is the voice of God within me, commanding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. By my reason only can I know Him.

I do not forget the plausible objections to making reason the standard in religion. They are only plausible, however.

First: the reason of many a man, if not of most men, and indeed of all men, is incompetent to be the standard. Then is it necessarily incompetent to choose the standard. For how, if it can not decide for itself what is religious truth, can it be capable of choosing the church, or creed, or man, or book that shall decide it? May I make the Bible the standard? Certainly not until after my reason has passed approvingly upon the claims of the book, and that too in the light of the book itself, and not merely nor mainly in the light of what is said about it. But if after this process I make the Bible the standard, is it not all one with making reason the standard? I add that no man can be a Christian whose reason is inadequate to decide what is Christianity.

Second: Making reason the standard of religion would make as many religions as there are persons—reason having in every mind a more or less different play from what it has in every other mind. I admit that there would be a great diversity of religious views, though the religion of all holy hearts would be substantially the same. But what of this diversity? Is not such a result of the workings of free intelligence infinitely preferable to a conformity which is arrived at by holding reason in abeyance? Oh! how much longer must men, for the sake of avoiding this diversity in religious faith, continue to "go it blind"? But,

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beside that this ecclesiastical policy results in the degradation of reason, and of the whole man, there is but little harmony secured in return for all this expense. For, brimful as is the religious world of efforts to establish a common standard outside of reason, and to enforce conformity, it is also brimful of diverse faiths and of relentless quarrels.

An error as great as common, is that we honor God by surrendering our judgment to the Church and the Bible. We deeply dishonor Him by it. Unswerving fidelity to our convictions is the highest service we are capable of rendering Him; for in our convictions is our highest possible present sense of God. The Bible or Church view of God may surpass our own immeasurably. But we can not claim the credit of it by simply adopting it; nor until it has become our own by being wrought into our convictions, and made a part of ourselves. We may *adopt* the religion of the Bible and the Church, and yet be atheists. For the adoption may simply prove our enslavement to authority, and that we are more willing to be the subjects of an unquestioning and blind faith, than to do and suffer what is needful in order to become intelligently and truly religious. For this very reason, that their religion is not their own—is adopted and superficial instead of inwrought—the mass of religionists are atheists.

But I shall be asked if I do not believe the Bible. I do. I believe it to be incomparably the best of books. Daily should it be studied and commented on in every school. Daily should its pages be pondered in the closet. Every morning and every evening should its precious lessons be repeated in the assembled family. The purest and sublimest morality is that of the Bible. Abundant proof is there in many of its pages that they who spoke or recorded the great words had drunk deeper of divine inspiration than any other men. It is because they had, that we always derive from this blessed book a deeper sense of holiness and a deeper sense of wickedness than from any other source. What words so fire our hatred of oppression as some which prophets spoke? When, too, do we so much appreciate goodness as while our hearts are melting over some of the lip and life-utterances of Jesus?

Nevertheless, there are portions of the Bible which are worth very little; and which, were they found elsewhere, no one

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would deem worth much. Moreover, if we are shocked at the supposition that there are mistakes and untruths in it, it is only because of our false and superstitious education. We must pass upon the Bible just as freely as upon any other book: and nothing in it that is repugnant to our reason must be allowed to come into our faith. We are not to reject whatever in it is above our present comprehension. That would be most unreasonable. But, whatever is clearly counter to reason, we owe it to reason, to ourselves, and to God to reject. If, for instance, there is any passage in the Bible, (I do not say there is one,) in which God is represented as being partial—as being guilty, it may be, of the monstrous partiality of loving one unborn child and hating another—we must not, for the sake of saving the reputation and authority of the book, acquiesce in a representation that outrages all our just conceptions of God. To save these conceptions is infinitely more important than to save the book. If, too, we find that Paul (I do not say that we do) represents woman as inferior to man, or as having lower and less rights than man, we must not, to save Paul, sanction his wrong against woman. Justice must be accorded to her claims at whatever expense to his speculations.

I am not, in these remarks, denying aught of the value of the Bible. Incomputable is that value, if for no other reason than that it contains the life of Christ. But I may be asked how, since I am not confident that the Bible is all true, I can be confident that it gives the true life of Christ? My answer is, that such a life could not be fabricated. It must have been substantially what the Bible represents it to be. Such a reality transcends all the possibilities of fiction. It can not be the coinage of the imagination. It can not be a picture without an original. Besides, had it been within the compass of a good man's ability to invent such a life, his goodness would have prevented his palming it on the world as a reality. I scarcely need add that any approach to such a life lies wholly without the range of a bad man's conceptions, and can find no place among his possible inventions. And what if it were admitted that such a life could be written at this day by Charles Dickens or Mrs. Stowe, or other persons of their fertile genius, nevertheless it must not be forgotten that it would be written by the light of the actual life of Jesus, and would therefore be substantially but a copy.

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Unspeakably happy fact is it that men are outgrowing the religions which have afflicted and debased them. An ignorant age very naturally submits to a religion of authority; but an intelligent age, which demands and realizes progress in every other direction, will not be content to have the dead past continue to furnish the religion of the living present. Signs are rapidly multiplying that the time has come for every man to have his own religion: not to adopt it from his neighbor, his priest, his church; but to construct it for himself. In the province of reason, when pervaded by Divine influences, and especially in the life of Jesus, who was the perfect impersonation of reason, because He was filled with those illuminating, holy, and sweet influences which can alone preserve the freest and fullest exercise of reason—there are abundant materials for such construction. Indeed, as in effect I have already said, what a man has to do to answer the calls of the true religion, is to keep all his appetites, passions, and inerests in subjection to his reason. I admit that he can not do this without help—the help of that same spirit which dwelt in Jesus—and which, by the way, is as free to us as it was to him. In a word, all he has to do is to keep his reason in the ascendant. Then he will be like God. For to obey reason is to obey God. To obey it is to bring ourselves into harmony with Him, and to make ourselves partakers of His character. To disobey it is to prefer the character of rebels and atheists.

The religions, including even that called Christianity, but which is not Christianity, have proved themselves false by their failure to overcome the great crimes and abominations. War, slavery, drunkenness, and the various oppressions of woman still abound. Give however, reason its full play—true reason, I mean, and not the mixture of passion and prejudice, which they who have stifled the voice of reason, are wont to confound with it—and these crimes and abominations would fast disappear. That they are still making hell on earth is chiefly because religions of authority put in pleas for them, and justify or apologize for them in the name of their sacred books and churches. Exalt reason, however, to the place of religion, or rather religion to the place of reason, and these crimes and abominations will depart. But, they will remain, and be rife just as long as there is religious authority to keep them in

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countenance; just as long as men suffer others to decide religious questions for them; to be the keepers of their conscience and the moulders of their minds. So long as rum-drinkers and slaveholders have a religion distinct from reason, they will run to it for permission to continue to drink rum and to be slaveholders; and they will not fail to get it. But once cut them off from their doctrinal or conventional religion, and throw them back upon their reason, and they will find it difficult to remain rum-drinkers and slaveholders. The South is full of the common religion, and hence the impossibility of peacefully dislodging her slavery. It is true that the religion of France was not essentially different from that of our own country. But so slender was its hold on the public mind, that it could not prevent the reason of France from abolishing Slavery. The abolition of French Slavery was largely owing to French infidelity. Had that nation been more religious and less rational, her slavery would have continued to this day.

It was the policy of Jesus to cut off the Jews from their spurious religion, and throw them back upon their convictions, and upon themselves. "And why," says he to them, "even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" The like policy should be pursued by the modern reformer. It is as indispensable now as it was then to get reason into the place of the current religion.

Our likeness to God! The religion which has this God-honoring and man-ennobling aim is to be our religion. Never does a man's dignity appear so great as when seen in the light of his capacity for resembling his Maker. It is in this light that he is "the temple of God," and is never to be defiled by rum, tobacco, nor any sensuality. And who, viewing man in this light, can be guilty of degrading him in thought, word or deed? Who, having drunk in the spirit of this true religion, and, therefore, opened his eyes upon the grandeur of man, can put upon his brother's limbs the chains of slavery, or consent to see him sunk to the guilty uses to which war sinks its hirelings? Or who, having, under the influences of this true religion, felt how great is man, can look with patience on his bondage to a political or ecclesiastical party?

This religion, then, which recognizes man's capacity for resembling his God, and which inculcates the duties growing out

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of that capacity—this is the only religion which can rid the world of the crimes that crowd it and the vices that have conquered it. This alone can shut up the dram-shop, and put an end to slavery and the other outrages upon the high nature of man.

But I must proceed to notice some of the charges against those who hold the views taken in this discourse.

We are accused of disparaging Christ because we refuse to be tested by certain mystic doctrines. Subscription to these doctrines is held to be essential to his honor. But they make most of Christ who, whatever their errors of doctrine, cherish his spirit and live his life. On the contrary, they make least of him who war upon his spirit and life—free however they may be, of these doctrinal errors.

The faith in Christ on which most rely is not that intelligent and cordial faith in his principles which good men alone can possess. But it is a faith of which wicked as well as good men can be the subjects—for it is superstitious, unintelligent and blind.

We hold that they most honor Christ who believe that the religion he taught is the religion of simple reason; and who also govern their lives by it. Let me add that I would have Christ honored in observing the rites and institutions as well as in espousing the comprehensive and essential principles of his religion. Let the principles be cordially adopted, and the rites and institutions carefully conformed to. For one, I would have the friends of Christ baptized with water, and in the manner in which he was. For one, I would have them partake of his appointed supper, and around a table, and with conversation as did he and his disciples. For one, I would have them observe a Sabbath, and choose for it the same day of the week which he and his disciples did. Even in things which are counted among the unessential, it is safer and happier to walk in his steps than to depart from them.

It is charged, too, that we are not Bible men. I admit that we are not any further than we live according to its great and everlasting principles. They are Bible men whose lives are in harmony with those principles; not they who trample upon them, at the same time that they make great merit of their pretended or imagined faith in the Bible.

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Another complaint is, that we would abolish the ministry. But we would not. We would have the Gospel preached tenfold more abundantly than now. To this end, however, no clerical order of men is needed. So simple is the true Gospel that he who loves it is well able to preach it, even though he may have no more than common-sense and a common education. Here and there arise men of rare power for preaching it. Let such be encouraged and enabled to itinerate as did Paul and Barnabas among the churches. At the same time let the members of every church feel that, however few or unlearned they may be, they are, under the divine blessing, able through the proper exercise of their gifts to edify each other.

I admit that a cultivated intellect adds immensely to the power of the preacher. But it need not be cultivated in the theological school. On the contrary, far more power to preach the common-sense, practical gospel of Jesus Christ is to be found in that general knowledge which the lawyer, or statesman, or enlightened merchant acquires in his intercourse with the world, than in the training of those institutions where religion is taught as a trade, and years of apprenticeship are spent to gain an understanding of its mysteries.

We are charged, too, with being Spiritualists. Some of us are and some of us are not Spiritualists. But what if we all were—still might we not all be Christians? To be a spiritualist—that is, to believe that spirits can communicate with us—is no proof that a man is or is not a Christan. His cordial reception, as evidenced in his life, of the great essential moral truths which come to him, whether in communications from spirits or from any other source, this and this alone proves that he is a Christian. If Spiritualism has been the occasion of harm to some, nevertheless there are others in whom it has wrought good. We have neighbors, whose religious life has been greatly improved by their interest in Spiritualism. I can not deny that Spiritualism is fraught with great evil to those who are foolish enough to welcome it as a new religion, and a substitute for Christianity.

A favorite, and certainly a very winning doctrine of the Spiritualists, is, that a wicked man attracts wicked spirits, and a good man good ones. How protective, purifying, and every way happy must be its influence on him who truly believes it!

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How efficient the motive it furnishes to avoid a bad and pursue a good life!

I must not to fail to add, in this connection, that the Spiritualists I met in my tours through the State, last fall, were nearly all reformers. They had broken off from both political and ecclesiastical parties, and were earnestly and openly devoting themselves to the abolition of sectarianism, slavery, intemperance, and other wrongs. I have no doubt that, in proportion to their numbers, Spiritualists cast tenfold as many votes for the Abolition and Temperance ticket as did others. Surely such a fact is highly commendatory of the influence of Spiritualism.

It is also said that we are opposed to revivals. We believe in revivals of true religion, and rejoice in them. But we confess that of revivals in general we are very suspicious. And why should we not be? It is true that they serve to fill up the churches; but do they increase the sum total of humanity and holiness and happiness? The revival of last year was preëminent for extent and commended character. But I am yet to be convinced that it has proved a public blessing. Survey the length and breadth of our State. Is not sectarian and party spirit, that power so mighty to shrivel and sink the soul, as rampant as ever? Was there ever a year in which the use of tobacco increased faster, or in which there was a more rapid multiplication of dram-shops? In no year among the last thirty, has so little interest been taken in the cause of temperance. Indeed, at the last election its professed friends seemed to delight in pouring contempt upon it. They were as eager to vote for rum men as they formerly had been to vote against them. And although there is still much talk (part sincere and part hypocritical, and nearly all nonsensical) against the extension of Slavery, yet has there never been a year since the dauntless young hero, William Lloyd Garrison, first summoned the nation to abolish it, in which has been evinced so little purpose to abolish it.

That there was a very unusual amount of religious tenderness and susceptibility the last year is not to be denied. Heaven be thanked for it; and may Heaven forgive the poor use men made of it! Oh! had the right stamp been present for making the right impression upon the molten metal! Had but the religion of Christ and reason—the religion which, in a

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land of Slavery and dram-shops calls on its new-born disciples to make their first demonstration against those greatest enemies of God and man—had but that religion been offered to the tens of thousands of hearts that were then open to receive it—what an array of practical Christians would have been the fruit of the revival! But alas! instead of this priceless blessing, the revival was perverted to the propagation of that worthless doctrinal or conventional religion which keeps on good terms with Slavery, and flourishes among the dram-shops!

The city of New-York was the great centre of the revival. But when I was there, two or three weeks ago, I heard that the use of tobacco and strong drink was increasing rapidly; and several times I saw what I never see without sickness of soul, deep shame and sorrow and disgust, city cars labeled: "Colored people allowed in this car." What an insult to our equal brethren! What an insult to our common Father! What a blasphemous denial of His right to color as He will the varieties of the human family!

Now, these abominations exist in that city, because her revived, augmented, multiplied churches acquiesce in them. Every one knows, that were her pulpits and pews to speak, and vote as they should, all her cars would be opened as readily to people of one complexion as another. Every one knows that the dram-shops of New-York could not withstand the combined testimony of her churches. But her churches are not churches of Jesus Christ any further than they are actively against her dram-shops and her outrages upon the colored man.

Peterboro, as you remember, shared in last year's revival. But, is she the better for it? Has she less sectarianism? Much more. Has she proved herself more true to temperance and freedom? Much less. Have even her pastors, who were so active in the revival, shown their own profiting by it? Of only one of them can I speak. I well remember how earnestly at former elections he called on the people to vote the abolition and temperance ticket; but I am told that he was never known to open his lips for it at the last election. It was a sad change in my old friend and pastor. Was it the revival or something else that wrought it? True, he is of late much taken up with the doctrines of religion. But does he hold that he is, therefore, excused from its practice? True, he is of late very busy

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in dealing damnation among those who dissent from his interpretation of these doctrines. But is the merit of this work so great as to atone for the neglect at the ballot-box of the bleeding slave and the bleeding cause of temperance? Oh! when will these doctrinal religionists learn that the promise of heaven is to him that "*worketh* righteousness?"—that "he that *doeth* righteousness is righteous," and that "whosoever *doeth not* righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

Finally, we are charged with being infidels. Now, although I would advise that this and all other false charges against us be borne with good temper, I am, nevertheless, of the opinion that we should quit the defensive, and pursue our assailants. When they charge us with being infidels because of our defective creeds, let us charge them with being infidels because of their wicked deeds. And this we are to do, not in the spirit of revenge, but for the purpose of putting them upon juster thoughts of themselves, and, as may perhaps follow, upon a needed condemnation of themselves. A very large majority of those who have the impudence to bring this charge against us prove themselves atheists by their treatment of their fellow-men. All persons are atheists who do not honor God by honoring his children. Hence, all are atheists who refuse to eat with their colored brethren, or to sit by their side in the carriage or the pew. And if there are Christians that vote for men who recognize the legality of Slavery, and wield the power of their office to perpetuate the bondage of the slave, none the less atheistic is such voting. And so, too, voting for those who recognize the sacred rights of property in intoxicating liquors, when offered for sale as a beverage, and who are in favor of keeping up the dram-shop, is none the less atheistic, because there are Christians who are guilty of it.

But I must bring my too long discourse to a close. This is an unsaved world. Superstitions have been employed to save it, and of course unsuccessfully. A misinterpreted and corrupted Christianity has been found inadequate. It will remain an unsaved world until trial shall be made of the true Christianity—of that religion of nature and reason which tests men not by their doctrines, but "by their fruits," and which makes it the one great work of every person to elevate himself and all within

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his reach to the very highest resemblances of God that humanity is capable of attaining.

Shall we, my neighbors, have a part in bringing the world under the power of this only saving religion? Let us remember that we can not have it, unless we bring ourselves under its power. We can not be instrumental in spreading abroad this only true religion unless we have made it the treasure of our own hearts and the attraction and glory of our own lives.

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THE RELIGION OF REASON.

A DISCOURSE BY GERRIT SMITH.

IN PETERBORO, JUNE 19TH, 1859.

WHAT is the true religion? No other question propounded to mortals is so important. Answered, however, it easily can be, if only the true God is known. For, wherever He is known, there also is the true religion known. The religion of a people necessarily adjusts itself to their apprehensions of God. Know they the true God?—then is theirs the true religion. But spurious is it if they know him not. Hence the question to the solution of which we address ourselves is, What is the true God?

That in knowledge and power God is infinite may be assumed. But what is his moral charcter? Is He just, reasonable, benignant, loving, beneficent? Or, is He unjust, arbitrary, capricious, malignant, injurious? To compress the question into the fewest words, Is it in good or evil that He delights?

In order to obtain a surely right answer to this question, we must study not the opinions which are formed of God, but God himself. We must look not at what others tell us of His works, but at the works themselves. We must go not to men's records of Him, but to his own: not to books written by men, but to books written by God—to such books as the sun and stars and earth. For not only is it true that God can be "understood by the things that are made," but it is also true that by no other means can He be understood. Only in this vast creation which we call Nature, can we find the certain evidences of God's nature.

Man is a part of this vast creation: and in the light of himself and of other parts of it, and of his relation to them, he has abundant proof that God delights in good. The sun, which

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lights and warms him, and the fruitful earth, which feeds and clothes him, are proofs of it. The returning seasons not only prove there is a God, but that He is a loving father. So full of His goodness are they that one of the poets calls them God. Though not a Pantheist, I nevertheless can forgive the Pantheistic personification into which this sweet poet is carried when he says of the seasons:

> "These as they change, Almighty Father, these
> Are but the *varied* God. The rolling year
> Is full of Thee."

I referred to the constitution of man for proof of the Divine goodness. How happy is he in obeying and how miserable in violating the laws of his own being! Should he not, then, allow himself to be convinced by these laws that his Maker is his friend and father?—the designer of good and not evil?—and that "Love" is among the fittest of all the names given to him?

And what is there throughout the realms of physical and moral government to raise so much as one doubt of the Divine attributes? In connecting peace with righteousness, and in ordaining the outflow of happiness from virtue, and misery from vice, has He not shown that love of the right and the pure, that benevolence and goodness are elements in His character? But death is in the world, is the reply; and such an evil and such a curse is it in the esteem of the theologians that they insist we need to go outside of nature and to other revelations for proof that God governs in justice and love. It is not true, however, that death is a curse; nor that it is so much as a calamity. That it is a penalty is purely a theological fiction. Were the laws of life and health properly observed, the common age of man reaching probably to a hundred years, would give ample time for making trial and reaping the enjoyments of this state of being. He would then feel death to be seasonable. Abundantly welcome would it be if he had observed the moral laws also—it being in his power to learn these as well as the physical, by studying the creation and providence of God. Abundantly welcome, I say—for then his holy, happy life would afford him the conscious preparation for a succeeding stage of existence. I add that death is necessary to make room for countless millions of human beings who otherwise could have no existence;

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and that thus it is to be credited with swelling indefinitely the sum total of human happiness. Again, while a perpetual earthly existence would be the foregoing of another and probably higher life, it would also be characterized by far less enjoyment, dignity, and usefulness, than is a limited earthly existence. Human nature is slow to be improved after its habits are formed and fixed. The commonest illustration of this is that the physicians over forty years of age rejected the discovery of the true theory of the circulation of the blood. Had the earth, instead of being peopled with a succession of young, and, because young, free spirits, been the abode of men who never die, hoary errors would have successfully conspired against all progress, had there, indeed, been any to conspire against. Of all the inventions which cluster upon our day, probably not one would have been known in the whole range, from the lucifer-match which supplies the place of carrying fire in a skillet, to the telegraph which does in a minute what live-forever men could hardly have *begun* in a month. Indeed, death seems to be as indispensable a provision of nature for improving the condition and character of man, as it does to prepare the way for new and improved races of animals. Why is it unreasonable to believe that the races of men millions of years hence will surpass what they are now, quite as much as the most finely organized and the most beautiful specimens of animals in this age of the earth surpass the trilobites and other fauna of the Silurian period? Surely while we see death to be so great a blessing, we are not to argue from it that God is not good; but we are rather to exalt ourselves to such a comprehension of it, that we shall see it to be among the most needed provisions for man, and therefore among the highest evidences of the Divine goodness. Is it said that great changes in the earth rendered it an impossible abode for those races of animals which have disappeared? Let us not forget that probably as great changes are still going on, and that probably they are continually calling for and continually contributing to corresponding changes in man as well as in animals.

It is a sound rule in logic to begin with the known and proceed to the unknown; to begin with what is self-evident and proceed to what requires proof. As such was my beginning, so I am now at liberty to advance to a proposition which requires

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a little defense. It is perhaps, however, only a little explanation that it requires. The proposition is that nature teaches there is a strong resemblance between God and man. They are "workers together." The grand Creator-worker and the little creature-worker are suited to each other. Man supplies what is lacking at the hand of God. He takes up nature from her Author, and develops her into new forms of embellishment, and results of higher usefulness. The work of each in the department of flowers shows that each has a taste for beauty and ornament. The work of each in the department of food for man and beast shows that each is provident and beneficent. The part that each has in feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, proves that both are pitiful and benevolent. The mountain which the one and the pyramid which the other builds prove that both enjoy the sublime, and that both work for the ages.

We have said enough to justify our inferring of the moral nature of God from that of man. We deduce the former from our knowledge of the latter. We know that man's moral nature is good, and therefore that God's is. Man is loving and merciful, and appreciates truth and equity. Goodness is natural to him. In the narration of Paul's shipwrecked company of two hundred and seventy-six persons it is said: "And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us *every one*, because of the present rain and because of the cold." It is true that this people might have murdered *every one*. But they would have done it under some misapprehension springing up in their barbarous ignorance, and contrary to that underlying humanity which called on them to save and comfort *every one* of their helpless guests.

The most barbarous people on earth, could they hear the story of the Good Samaritan, would honor him and condemn the Priest and Levite. Even such a people would applaud the golden rule, and would also acknowledge truth to be right and lying to be wrong. I do not forget that such crimes as burning the widow and casting the infant into the river are often cited to prove that human nature is blind, and bad, and base. These, however, are crimes not of, but against, human nature. They express its perversions, not itself. The religions of the world are mainly responsible for this class of crimes. It is these re-

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ligions that have in all lands and ages outraged human nature, ignored it, and created monsters to take its place and wear its name. Most of the great crimes (Slavery included) which have disgraced and crushed mankind, have been committed either avowedly in the name of religion, or directly or indirectly under its promptings; and scarcely ever without the plea of its sanction.

Let, then, the theologians continue to insist on the badness, baseness, and blindness of human nature; we nevertheless will continue to repose faith in its moral perceptions and in its discernment and appreciation of truth, justice, and mercy. We nevertheless will continue to draw from his resemblances to man some of our strongest arguments for attributing a just, forgiving, and loving spirit to God.

Most persons will recoil from the inference of God's goodness from man's. Their eye is on the masses of men. But the masses are only the ruins of men—though even in these ruins, noble and beautiful characteristics of human nature can still be discovered. Human nature can not be so successfully judged of in the light of those who trample upon as of those who obey its laws. We should judge of it by good men. Nay, we should come at once to Jesus, and judge of it by him: for he is its best specimen, since he was perfectly obedient to all the laws of his being. When we say that the Divine nature is like human nature, we do indeed mean that God resembles even the common and unfavorable specimens of man, though of course much less than He does the best. But when Jesus, the model man, is in our eye, then do we say with an emphasis that God is like man.

Another argument to sustain the conclusion that God is like man is, that it can not, without the greatest violence to all probability, be supposed that He would create His intelligent beings with a moral nature contrary to His own. Were His nature malignant so would be theirs. But we see them to be on the side of justice and goodness, and so therefore is He.

Now, if human nature, wherever its voice can be heard beneath the immeasurable wrongs and outrages which are every where heaped upon it, and are every where at work to suppress that voice, does still, in spite of those wrongs and outrages, witness for truth and justice and love and mercy, then surely these qualities must all be found in the Author of human na-

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ture. Moreover, they must be perfect in Him, in order to correspond with the perfect wisdom, skill, and contrivance manifested in His works. The attributes of Deity, if bad, must be entirely bad; if good, entirely good.

When, then, we are told that God could not forgive sin until His angry spirit had been appeased and His laws satisfied by the sufferings of an innocent person, we reply that this view of Him and of His spirit and laws is forbidden, not only by what we learn of Him and them directly from His outward and visible creations, but also from those clearly warrantable inferences of His moral nature which we draw from that of man. His character, as viewed from these indubitable sources, assures us that He is ever ready to forgive every repentant offender. Jesus was assured of it, else he would not have taught it in the parable of the prodigal son. But Jesus goes much further. His words on the cross imply a belief that his Father is ready to forgive the impenitent also, provided that ignorance be coupled with their impenitence. But even men are good enough to do all this. Much more then is God. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts, how much more your Father?"

But it is said that nature and the history of man abound in analogies to the Atonement. I can not admit that any such analogies are to be found in either. It is true that ofttimes the guiltless suffer for the guilty—now of necessity, and now of choice. But in no case is there a transference of character from one to the other. The guilty party remains no less guilty, and the guiltless party contracts no guilt literal or constructive. Remember, too, that the human sense of justice revolts at visiting upon the good man the penalty due to the bad man—a strong argument, by the way, that the Divine sense does also.

When, too, we are told that God has prepared an eternal hell —a place of endless and inconceivably exquisite tortures—for a large share of his children, we are sure that this shocking picture finds no counterpart and no warrant in creation and Providence. These tell us of a father and not of a fiend; of love, and not of hatred; of forgiveness, and not of revenge. These tell us that in all ages God has made "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good," and has sent his "rain on the just and on the unjust;" and these bid us hope that in other worlds, as

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well as in this, He will still be the father and the friend of men. Again, if men are miserable here, it is not of His infliction, but because they make themselves so; yes, and make themselves so in the midst of the numberless and sufficient means He has provided for making themselves happy. If, in this world, men persevere in ruining themselves, it is in the face of His perseverance to save them. And why should it be otherwise in other worlds? From nothing we see of God is He changeable. We are bound to believe that He is as ready to afford His children opportunities in one stage of being as well as in another, for the improvement of their character; and that He is ever intent, as much so in one world as in another, to do them good and not evil. And why should we doubt that God is as forgiving in another life as in this? Would Jesus have told us to set no limits to the times of forgiving our brother, had he believed that the exercise of God's forgiving spirit is confined to this first brief stage of human existence? Would he have told us to be so much better than he believed God to be?

Eternal hell! Then must sin be an eternally-disturbing force in the universe. For manifestly when sin shall have ceased, punishment will also.

Eternal hell! Yes, and it is to be suffered by men of the loveliest character, provided they were not able to subscribe in this life to certain ecclesiastical interpretations of a book.

Putting people into an eternal hell! Why, the worst of men would not thus serve their worst enemies. How much less would God! Orthodoxy makes God infinitely more malignant and cruel than are the most malignant and cruel men.

Eternal hell! No man does and no man can believe it. It is untrue if only because human nature is incapable of believing it. Moreover, were such a belief possible it would be fatal. Let the American people wake up with it to-morrow, and none of them would go to their fields, and none to their shops, and none would care for their homes. All interest in the things of earth would be dead. The whole nation would be struck with paralysis, and frozen with horror. Even the beginnings of such a belief are too much for the safety of the brain; and every step in that direction is a step toward the madhouse. The orthodox preacher of an eternal hell would himself go crazy did he believe his own preaching. Did he see his wife, or children, or

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friends, or neighbors, in danger of falling into it, he would be overpowered by the sight. He saves his sanity only through his insincerity. To be sincere in his preaching he must first be insane.

The little influence of their religion on its professors is often wondered at. But why should it be? They do not believe their religion, and they can not, so long as an eternal hell is a part of it. Since their belief of this part is at the most but a dreamy and fancied one, there can hardly be a real, earnest and deeply-influential belief of any part. Their conscious or unconscious distrust of the truth of this part necessarily begets a similar distrust of the truth of every part. The enormous draught at this point upon their staggering faith can not fail to cast in their view an air of unreality over the whole of their religion. Herein is the explanation of the fact that, while an ignorant church is little better than a mass of superstition, a more enlightened one is little better than a mass of infidelity and hypocrisy. The members of the latter, required to believe in more than their credulity can swallow, do truly and deeply believe in nothing; and thus are they infidels. Moreover, they are very great hypocrites, since they stoutly profess to believe it all. Doubtless, one of their motives for this boundless profession of faith is to supply their conscious lack of it. They are something like Mrs. Stowe's Candace, who, to atone for her past lack of faith in the celebrated Bible apple, was now ready to eat apple, tree, and all.

We are wont to lament the prevailing want of religious earnestness. But should we not rather rejoice in it, seeing how monstrous are the religions? With what a good stomach we should hate, and crush, and kill one another, if we really believed that we are such devils as our religions picture us to be! Once persuade me that God is waiting to roast my neighbor, and the way is made easier for persuading me that I shall do God service by hurrying that neighbor with a dagger or bullet into the prepared fire.

But it is held that these things, which are so at war with Nature and Providence, are affirmed by the Bible. I do not admit that they are. Certainly they are not by the Bible as a whole. But even if they were, that would not prove them to be true. It would only prove that, so far, the Bible is false. Whether

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these things are true or false, is a question to be referred not to the umpirage of a book, but to the infinitely higher one of Nature and Providence.

But is not the Bible the word of God? It is no further such than it corresponds with the manifestations of God. It is to be judged by Nature and Providence. Formerly, men in their folly made the Bible paramount to Nature and Providence, as even now does the splendid Baptist writer of New-York who calls geology and astronomy "inferior truth." They went to it to study the motions of the heavenly bodies. But wise men went to astronomy. Even in our own day there are persons who go to the Bible for an understanding of earthly creations; and even dear Hugh Miller himself thought it very important to save it from the reproach of ignorance in this respect. Wise men, however, go to geology, caring nothing at all of the havoc it may make of the traditions and allegories of Genesis. Folly, sheer folly, seeks to mould the mountains, and deposit the rocks and account for the waters in harmony with those traditions and allegories. But wisdom lets the mountains, rocks and waters, speak for themselves, let what will gainsay them. So, too, it is held that the Bible, and the Bible alone, explains the moral government of the world. Most religionists, very foolishly turning their backs upon the sure light that Creation and Providence shed upon this subject, as foolishly acknowledge the words of a book to be conclusive upon it. Alas! that men should fancy that they do in this wise honor the revealed God! They deeply dishonor Him. For the revelations of a book, to which they confine themselves, are as small as they are uncertain, compared with "the abundance of the revelations" in nature.

But is not the Bible inspired? The spirit of much of it comes, I admit, from the heavenly fount. Very common earthly sources, however, would be adequate to supply most of the remainder. No other pages are so full of the Divine presence and power as are a part of its pages. But there are pages of the Bible which might have been written by entire strangers to that presence and power.

Is not, however, the Bible infallible? No person but God is infallible; and no thing but nature. Nature is the infallible witness for the infallible God. Precious source of enlighten-

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ment is the Bible. But in the light of nature only, (I need not add providence, since that is a part of or essentially connected with nature,) can the true religion be surely learned. The Bible is the work of man, and hence even its best pages must bear the marks of human imperfection. But the volume of nature is written by the finger of God, and is, therefore, as free from error as Himself. What, however, is the Bible, or rather a Bible, that we are bound to adopt the whole of it unquestioningly, and to worship it, and to insist that there is not in the whole of it one unsound doctrine, nor one false sentiment? I wish all the clergy would tell their hearers that it is simply a selection from ancient writings—a selection, too, made by persons who no one claims were inspired. Such outspoken honesty would serve to overthrow a great deal of superstition, and to dispel a great deal of delusion. Millions, on hearing this news, would look upon the Bible with new eyes. Then, for the first time, they would have courage to exercise (but oh! with what trembling!) their reason upon it, and to judge of its merits for themselves. Then, for the first time, the soul-darkening, soul-shriveling, and soul-enslaving religion of authority, would begin to give place in them to the soul-enlightening, soul-expanding, and soul-freeing religion of reason.

The clergy should also frankly tell their hearers that they who undertook to make up a Bible differed widely among themselves in respect to what should go to make it up. They should tell them how some voted to receive and others to reject this, that, and the other of these ancient writings. Nor should they forget to add, that the Catholics hold that the Protestant Bible does not take in near as many of those ancient writings as it should; and that the Protestants hold that the Catholic Bible takes in far more than it should.

Perhaps both the Catholic and Protestant Bibles take in too many of these writings: perhaps too few. Were I to make up a Bible for myself, it might differ much from both. It might be inferior, possibly it might be superior to both. But, however this may be, my assumption of the right to force it upon the conscience of others would be no more arrogant and nonsensical than is the like assumption in behalf of the existing Bibles. Every man is in an important sense bound to make up a Bible for himself. But while this is required by the religion

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of reason, the religion of authority claims that its patent right from heaven to make Bibles excludes every other right to make them.

I refused to admit that the Bible, especially as a whole, justifies the popular or orthodox view, either of the Atonement or of future punishment. An eternal hell finds no countenance in the Old Testament, and is opposed to the general tenor of the New. There are a few words in the latter which favor the institution. I say institution—for if Slavery may be dignified with this name, it is peculiarly proper that every other hell should be. Such of these few words as are attributed to Jesus (and most of them are) would be entitled to our most profound and earnest consideration, could we be sure that he uttered them. But even if we could be, we should be more or less uncertain to what they refer. Moreover, as they are used in connection with his highly figurative and surpassingly hyperbolical language, we should be apprehensive that to put a literal interpretation upon them might be to sacrifice their significance. Manifestly, then, these few words constitute a basis quite too narrow and uncertain on which to build an argument for an eternal hell—an argument leading to the most important and appalling of all conclusions.

In every age, thousands of the learned spend no little time in concentrating the whole power of their minds, and the whole interest of their hearts, upon inquiries into the meaning of an adjective which Jesus is reported to have coupled with the word "punishment." Upon that meaning they make turn the future and eternal condition of man. What matchless folly to go to an adjective, instead of God, with a question of such overwhelming importance! Nay, what insanity to be thus driving an exclusive search into a word, for the purpose of learning the very little of the Divine will which can be learned from a mere word, while all the while the heavens above our heads, and the earth beneath our feet, are teeming with unmistakable and conclusive evidences of that will! Oh! when will men "turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein; and left not himself without witness in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness!"

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To return for a moment to this unduly-magnified adjective. Is it properly translated into "everlasting?" That is uncertain. Uncertain, too, is it whether it was spoken in Hebrew, Syriac, or Greek. For scholars can no more decide in what language it was spoken than in what language the Book of Matthew was first written. Now, if the idea which Jesus conveyed in this word, and in its original connections, has indeed gone the round of all these languages, then it would not be strange if, by the time it reached our language, it had become a greatly changed idea.

Nor can it be properly said that the popular or orthodox view of the Atonement is sustained by the Bible. The few passages for it are inconsistent with the general tenor of the book.

The Jews were waiting for the Messiah. He came. The mass did not own him; and the few who did were sadly disappointed and utterly confounded by his death. They "thought it had been he who should have restored Israel." But in process of time happy turns were given to his death, whereby the believing Jews were lifted up out of the despair into which that death had sunk them. One of these turns, as honest, I admit, as it was natural, was the Atonement. The sacrifice of animals for the remission of sins was deeply rooted in the Jewish faith. A very easy step, therefore, was it to a fanciful analogy between such sacrifice and the death of Christ, and still easier was the succeeding step which transmuted the fiction into an indubitable fact. The early Gentile converts were probably but little interested in the Atonement. Not being prepared for it by a Jewish education, they would be slow to receive it. To them Paul says very little of it. The sacrifices of the Greeks and Romans differed widely from those of the Jews.

I admit that the Atonement is, in the esteem of the majority of Christians, the great central doctrine of Christianity—the great saving doctrine, inasmuch as they hold that every man denying it must perish, and that Christianity itself would perish without it. But if the faith of the earliest Christians is appealed to for determining its relative importance, then will but little account be made of the doctrine. Jesus did not teach it, nor was it taught until many years after his death. It would not be held to at this day, had not Paul taught it. Paul would not

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have taught it, had he not been a Jew. The Jews would not have received it but for their faith in animal sacrifices; and from this faith they would have been free, had they entirely outgrown paganism. It was because of their pagan conceptions of Deity that they numbered damnation and destruction among His intensest delights. It was because of the lingerings of paganism in them, that they attributed to Him a burning wrath which blood and suffering could alone appease.

No, the Atonement was not the preëminent doctrine with the early Christians. The Resurrection held that place. This was the "hope" for which Paul was judged—the "hope that there shall be a resurrection of the dead." He taught that their preaching and faith were vain if there be no resurrection.

I have mentioned one of the happy turns given to the death of Christ. Another and no less honest one was that which made his death lead to a triumphant argument for the resurrection. If Christ had risen, then there would be a rising of all, "both of the just and the unjust." His resurrection was held to be the earnest—the "first fruits" of the general resurrection.

With the believing Jews, the Messiah's reign—a visible and literal reign—was second in importance to the resurrection only. They were sure of it. So, too, was Jesus. The difference between himself and them on this point was, that they believed he would set up his kingdom then, and he that he must first pass through the gates of death. Soon after his death, however, they believed that he had risen, and the effect of this belief was to renew their confidence in his kingdom. Confident were they that he would soon return to "reign in righteousness." Full of this confidence was Paul. He doubted not that "the end of the world has come;" though he did not think it to be quite as near as the Thessalonians did. Peter doubted not that "the end of all things is at hand." So, too, James, "that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." And John adds: "We know it is the last time." But Christ did himself assign a very early date to his return. Matt. 16 : 28; 24 : 34; Mark 9 : 1; Luke 21 : 32.

It surely should not be allowed to deduct any thing from our estimate of the value of Christ, nor from our love of him and interest in him, that in this and that instance the Father has

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disclosed the "day and hour not to the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son." I know how common is the remark that Christ can not be loved by those, and can be of no avail to those, who do not see him to be at all points one with his Father. But the remark is as foolish as it is common. That he is one with his Father in spirit and character makes him all we need of him; and it should produce in us no sorrowful disappointment and no sense of loss to know that in the end "shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him, that God may be all in all." Alas! that men should waste their time and zeal upon these speculative and profitless questions about Christ. To every one thus unwisely employed does he say as he did to the impertinent Peter: "What is that to thee? follow thou me." Suppose Christ did misapprehend some or even many of the things in the future. No less bound are we to follow him, and grow in likeness to him. No less is he God's own spirit "manifest in the flesh." No less is he our teacher, pattern, Saviour.

Yes, Jesus believed not only that the Jewish nation would within a few years be overwhelmed and scattered, but that "then" would his kingdom be set up, and "with power and great glory. The temple, Jerusalem, and Judea, did all meet their fate before the generation to which Jesus spoke had passed away. But his kingdom has not yet been set up, nor have the signs appeared which were to precede it.

By the way, is not the scene described in Matt. 25 : 31 to 46, substantially identical with that described in Matt. 24 and Luke 21, and therefore was it not to be enacted within a few years from the day in which Christ pictured it before his hearers? In other words, is that scene, instead of being, as is held, the final judgment of all the living and dead, any thing more than a merely Jewish scene? In Matt. 24 and Luke 21, we have the foretelling of the ruin of the Jewish nation and the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom. In Matt. 25, are we not informed of the reward of those Jews who welcomed the ministry of Christ, and of the punishment of those Jews who rejected it—especially of the reward of those who, during his expected brief disappearance from earth, should honor his disciples—even "the least" of them—and the punishment of those who, during that brief period, should neglect those disciples—even "the least" of them? It is true that the word is

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translated "nations," but it is also true that "nations" is not among its primary meanings, and that "multitudes," "companies," "tribes" are. In the light of Matt. 19 : 28, do we not see some evidence that "tribes" would be a proper translation, and that the judgment in view was not to be of "all nations," but only of all the Jewish tribes?

I readily admit that this passage in Matt. 25 would not, if standing alone, easily bear this unusual interpretation. But must it not be looked at in connection with Matt. 16, and Mark 9, and Luke 21, etc., and interpreted in the light of these Scriptures as well as in the light of its own language? Moreover, we must remember both how exceedingly figurative is the language in Matt. 25, and how improbable it is that it is reported with entire correctness. I confess that owing to the fact that a simultaneous judgment of all the living and all the dead is a puzzle to common-sense, I am liable to give force to what are but feeble and, indeed, but seeming objections to the common interpretation of the scene in Matt. 25.

But however this sublime scene should be interpreted, our duty to identify ourselves with the cause of Christ, and to walk in his steps, remains the same. Admit we must that every explanation of it is beset with difficulties. Nevertheless, we repeat that Jesus remains the same model of moral character by which every one is bound to fashion his own, and the same personification of love and holiness which every one should aspire to become.

Far from inexplicable is it that so many stickle for the divinity and atonement of Christ and other metaphysical doctrines coupled with His name, while so few are found who are intent on breathing His spirit and copying His life. Self-complacent logic suffices for the former; but to accomplish the latter there must be the self-denying and cross-bearing cultivation of character. The bare profession of Christ meets the whole demand in the one case. But character — even the character of Christ—is called for at every step in the other. In the light of this distinction, we see how it is that, while Christians are so very scarce, sectarians are so very plenty. Difficult it is to follow Christ; but easy to be swayed by a party zeal for this or that denomination. Difficult it is to perform duties; but easy to prate about doctrines.

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I am reminded in this connection of the denial of Christian character to all who disbelieve or doubt any of the miracles in the history of Christ. But the denial is as unjust as it is common, since it turns not at all upon, and does not at all involve, our moral character whether we do or do not give credit to miracles. Men may be either good or bad, and give such credit; either good or bad, and withhold it. A scholar in this day, however devout, would be very like to withhold it; for, aware as he is that all nations abound in traditions of miracles, and agreeing with the intelligent that all others are false, he quite naturally calls in question the truth of the Christian miracles also. He doubts even the miraculous conception of Jesus. For in his extensive reading he has found the instances very common all along down the track of the world's history, in which a supernatural origin is attributed to its heroes and philosophers. It would not be strange if, remembering that Plato was believed to be the offspring of a god and a virgin, and if, remembering, too, that it was also believed that the man who subsequently became her husband was told, in a dream, by the god not to marry her until her divine child was born—I say, it would not be strange if he should suspect that the account of the origin of Jesus is but a substantial repetition of this fable about Plato. The scholar might be all wrong in this suspicion. Nevertheless, he would not necessarily be a sinner for it.

To be frank, I suppose that all enlightened and broad-minded men do at least doubt the truth of miracles. They have never seen any, and hence they are slow to yield to even abounding testimony in their behalf. Had they ever seen so much as one miracle, they could easily be brought to believe in others, on the same principle that, having seen one city, men can be persuaded of the existence of others. Moreover, it is especially difficult for him to believe in the Christian miracles who reflects that Christianity has done more than all things else to dispel belief in miracles. He would naturally expect that a religion of such an effect would keep itself clear of miracles. By the way, this effect of Christianity is among the arguments for regarding it as a natural rather than a supernatural religion.

I was speaking of Christ's misapprehensions of the future, when I was drawn off upon an incidental subject. May I not add to what I said of these misapprehensions, that He became,

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on His ascension, immeasurably more than perhaps He himself expected to be? He lived and died the Messiah of the Jews; and not only did He believe, in common with His disciples, that He would return to earth, but it is somewhat probable that He also believed that He would return to earth in no wider capacity than that in which He left it. Unbounded and everlasting thanks to God, His Messiahship and nationality fell off at the grave, and He arose the Saviour of Mankind! His life, and death, and words, and spirit, are not the monopoly of one nation, but the common property of all. They are not for the salvation and glory of the Jew only, but of all, whether Jew or Gentile, who are willing to be saved and glorified by them.

It is time, however, we had returned from this long digression, in which, while we have vindicated the Bible, we have, nevertheless, admitted that nature is the only authoritative instructor in our study of the character of God. Before making this disgression, we had said enough to prove what, in the light of this instructor, is that character. We saw God to be just and good; and hence it is entirely plain to reason that justice and goodness are the spirit of the true religion. For, as was said in the beginning of our discourse, the true religion must be like the true God. Another thing no less plain to reason is, that if the religion in our hearts is the true one, it will be found to recognize and honor and harmonize with the several kinds of intelligent beings with which it has to do. While toward God and men and angels (provided it has to do with angels also) it is always the same spirit of justice and goodness, it nevertheless adapts itself to the different demands of the three different natures.

The Psalmist says: "My goodness extendeth not to Thee." There is a sense in which this is emphatically true. Nevertheless the love, gratitude, adoration, prayer due to God are expressions of the goodness as well as of the justice which enter into the spirit of the true religion. In other words, there are services of religion which are Godward—being called out by his nature, and adapted to it.

Excuse me for making another disgression. Just here I must defend prayer—the duty of the exercise being strongly doubted in some quarters, and even totally denied in others. It is apprehended by some, and fully believed by others, that prayer overlooks and interferes with the general laws of the universe.

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Men must have become persuaded of the truth of the doctrine of Divine influence before they will become men of prayer. The influence of a great and good man pervades his town, his county, and, may be, his whole State. Why, then, may not God's influence pervade His universe? But skepticism knows the means by which man's influence is diffused, and not those by which God's is. And shall it, therefore, deny that those exist, and deny, too, that the influence itself exists?

The doctrine of Divine influence admitted, and there are prayers which all will see to be reasonable; such as are in effect prayers for the opening of the mind to that influence. Do I pray for an increase of my physical or spiritual health? If I pray intelligently, it is not that God may increase it, but that He may influence me to increase it by my improvement of the means to that end placed by His providence within my reach. In other words, it is asking Him to dispose me to answer my own prayers; and surely this is not ignoring any general laws with which we are acquainted; nor is it asking Him to come into conflict with them.

Widely different, I admit, would be the case were I praying for sunshine or rain. That would be praying that a work may be done not by myself but by God—and a work involving, it might be, an arrest of some of His general laws. Nevertheless, I do not say that there are no possible circumstances in which a people are to feel at liberty to pray for what involves such arrest. When threatened with famine by drouth or rain, or with some other great calamity, they, perhaps, ought so to pray, and not to confine themselves to prayer for resignation. For we do not know but, in so praying, they would keep themselves in harmony with a law as old and fixed and eternal as the general laws referred to. A law there may be which shall provide that even these general laws shall give way in certain circumstances—as for instance, before the prayers of a suffering people, who shall have greatly honored themselves and their God, by attaining a certain posture of soul. A law is not impossible, which, the conditions precedent being supplied, shall compel even the sun and moon to stand still, in answer to prayer. I confess that it is not for man to limit the Divine possibilities, nor to essay to number and comprehend all the laws of the universe.

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Are my suppositions at war with the unchangeableness of the general laws? They are not. The provision from eternity, that a possible or given conjuncture shall serve to arrest one of these laws, is from eternity a part of that law: and the actual conjuncture does not change the law.

We can not guard too carefully against all undue limitation of the efficiency of prayer, and all undue diminution of the motives to engage in it. Let us, who believe that the religion of reason calls for the religion of nature, remember that the flow of prayer is as natural as the flow of water. The prayerless man has become an unnatural man. Jesus "continued all night in prayer to God:" and he was the wisest and best of men, because the most natural of men—because the truest to his nature.

I will say nothing here of "special providences," except that if they do occur they must be the result of the unchangeable and eternal laws of the unchangeable and eternal God.

A few words more in regard to these general laws. There is a view of them which multiplies infidels with a fearful rapidity. It is that view which puts them in the place of a personal God, by representing Him as having set them in motion, and then turning his back upon them. But these laws are not God. They are only the modes by which He works, and they have no power only as He constantly energizes them, and no existence only as He constantly breathes his own into them.

To return again to the line of argument in this discourse—I was speaking of the true religion as a spirit of justice and goodness, and also of its proper service toward God. I now pass on to speak of its proper and more important service toward man. More important I say, since its truest service toward man is also its truest service toward God. More important, too, since only a small part of our time should be consumed with direct duties to God, and nearly all of it with direct duties to man. Paul says that "*all* the law is fulfilled" in our duties to man.

Alas! how wanting in the characteristics of the true religion have the prevailing religions of the world always proved themselves to be by their unhappy bearing on human nature! Conclusive witnesses of this are those deep wrongs done to man ever and every where; that contemptuous disregard of his rights; that heartless indifference to the essential wants and urgent demands of his high and sacred nature. What overwhelming tes-

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timony against these religions have we in Polygamy, Land-monopoly, War, Slavery, and the annihilation of the rights of Woman!

These crimes prevail because conventional and false religions prevail: and never shall we find relief from them and a remedy for the ruin they have wrought, until we shall find it in a religion harmonizing with human nature, and growing out of it—a religion, in short, which shall allow human nature to be a law unto itself and to be its own religion. That eminently profound observer, Madame de Staël, justly accords to the Christian philosophy the high honor of seeking to harmonize religion with human nature, (*celle qui cherche l'analogie de la religion avec la nature humain.*) I add that we can never learn what is the true religion except by studying the rights and wants of human nature.

Hitherto religions altogether alien and revolting to human nature have been forced upon it—religions whose slanderous song is:

> "Nature must count her gold but dross,
> If she would gain the heavenly land;"

religions that have impudently and lyingly asserted their superiority to human nature, and that have thereby succeeded in bringing it under their tyrannical and crushing sway; religions that under the plea of saving human nature, have gone about to kill it. Is this idea of having our nature be our law and our religion, startling and offensive to you? Goodness, I am aware, is well-nigh universally regarded as an external injunction upon, rather than a law of, our nature. But to be truly good and truly religious, is not to be in bondage to a foreign authority. It is, on the contrary, to enjoy the freedom of living out our own good nature and being ourselves. He who made us bids us be what He made us—bids us live out ourselves.

I know that this doctrine of the goodness of human nature must shock some of my hearers—for they, and, indeed, nearly all of us, were trained up to believe in its total depravity. Would that men universally had faith in its goodness! Such faith would serve mightily to lift up their lives to the high level of their nature. On the other hand, their degrading submission to the doctrine of their total depravity goes very far toward accounting for their false morality, base spirit, and dwarfed manhood. So long as they believe in this doctrine, they will be an

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easy prey to the priesthood. For so long they will feel themselves to be incapable of distinguishing right from wrong, and compelled to go outside of themselves to supply the deficiency. This deficiency the priesthood stands ever ready to supply, either by means of its interpretation of books, or simply its own dicta. Hence men receive this as right, and reject that as wrong, not because they see them to be so, but because of their being told that they are so. Hence it is explained that many worthy people admit that even Slavery is right. Instantly would they condemn it were their moral sense allowed to pass upon it. But their moral sense, the theologians tell them, is so blunted and blinded by their total depravity as to make it necessary to supersede it by a revelation—by a book. It is by thus denying to men the ability, and therefore the right, to judge for themselves, even in the plainest of moral matters; it is by thus overriding them with authority, and reducing them to puppets, that they are so largely characterized by a sense of irresponsibility, by ignorance, weakness, superstition, cowardice. It is, in a word, by this means, that they are brought to live a life which is sunk so far below their nature.

A natural religion is, as we have already substantially said, the only one for which reason calls. Men study books to learn religion. But while we readily admit that some books, and especially the precious Bible, (that most eloquent defender, next to Nature, of both Divine and human rights, as we joyfully see it to be when wielded by such a mighty man of God as Cheever,) are useful to this end, we must nevertheless insist that the study of nature is immeasurably more so. So far as the Vedas or Koran may be a record of the teachings of nature, or may be in harmony with those teachings, they are valuable: and only by the same rule is the value of the Bible to be judged. It is by means of books and their own imaginations that men conjure up these crazy religions that make such frightful and ruinous war on human nature—dwarfing and shriveling it with the terrors of their horrid hells, and debasing and befooling it with their superstitious and puerile pictures of heaven. But only let reason be obeyed, and a natural religion be allowed to take the place of these artificial, fanciful, and insane religions, and the abuses of human nature will cease, and the deep wounds they have made upon it will be quickly healed,

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its fair proportions be all recovered, and its union with the Divine nature be reëstablished.

I spoke of the mistake of studying religion in books rather than in nature. I remark, incidentally, that in this mistake is to be found the fruitful source of sectarianism. Were the nature-religion substituted for the book-religion, there could be no sect. Nearly all cultivated men read nature substantially alike, and so would all men but for the authority which they allow to certain books. Take away from the thousand Christian sects their temptation to quarrel about a few words in the Bible, and their occupation would be gone, and their death would be certain. But this temptation will all disappear the moment they shall see that nature, and not a book, is authority in religion.

It is our duty to be reformers. But reformers we shall not be unless we make ourselves aware and keep ourselves aware of the spuriousness of the popular religion. Frequent are the occasions which reveal that spuriousness: and it may be profitable for us all if we bring into review at this time some of these revelations.

The Governments of Massachusetts and New-York were recently called on to provide protection for fugitive slaves. But they refused. Why did they? Government in its true sense is simply the collective people, charged with the duty of protecting each one of the people. The plea for their refusal was, that Massachusetts and New-York are under a promise not to protect this class of persons. Admit that they are, (though every endeavor to show that they are must be in contempt and defiance of the canon of legal interpretation,) nevertheless, ought not the protection to have been afforded first, and the promise to have been considered afterward? The duty of the protection could not be conditional on any thing. At all times, and in all circumstances, such a duty is imperative and absolute. Ought not Herod to have saved John first, and to have left to after consideration his promise involving the contrary? Moreover, could it have been the true religion which would have led him, in such after consideration, to regret the breaking of a promise that called for murder? Certainly not. No more could it have been the true religion which would have brought the Legislatures in question to repent themselves of having broken a promise which called for a greater crime than murder.

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I say a greater—for to be guilty, directly or indirectly, of replunging a brother into the pit of Slavery is worse than to have a part in murdering him. We had all rather have our children murdered than enslaved. The Legislature or Court that dares insult human nature by entertaining the question whether man is merchandise is no better than a mob, and has no more rights than a mob. Nay, it is a mob; and a right-minded people would sustain their Executive in forcibly dispersing it. Were the people of Ohio inspired by the true religion, instead of being debased by a false one, they would command their Governor to put an immediate stop to this trying of men in her Courts for not obeying a law for Slavery. There can be no law for what is itself not law; and to know Slavery as law is an offense against human nature, unsurpassed, as well for its absurdity, as for its criminality.

Let me not be understood as holding that every unwise promise should be broken. If I have promised two dollars for a service which proves to be worth but one, I had, nevertheless, better pay the two dollars. If the people have in the Constitution promised to do foolish things, let them be done, provided the doing of them is insisted on. But whatever may be said in regard to things merely foolish, there can be no obligation to do what is clearly wicked. Law is for righteousness. For wickedness there can be no law.

In this great wickedness of the Legislatures of Massachusetts and New-York, the people of these States acquiesce. Doubtless they stand ready to reëlect those members who voted against the slaves, under the plea of their virtual promise to vote against them. Doubtless they do themselves feel the force of this plea. So far as they do, they prove that the religion of the people, as well as of the Legislatures of these States, is no better than that of the infamous Herod. Thus abominable is a conventional and book-religion. But in what beautiful contrast to it stands the religion of nature!—that reasonable religion which treats all beings according to their natures—the man according to his, and the horse according to his; not the man as if he were a horse, any more than the horse as if he were a man. Our slaveholding religion subjects a man to the discipline of a horse, and thus rivals the absurdity of the memorable attempt in Rome to exalt a horse to the dignity of a

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man. The religion of nature does not treat one man as a hog, and another as superhuman, but, recognizing the common nature of all men, be they white, red, or black, it brings them all under a common treatment. Hence, the religion of nature can have no fellowship with slaveholding, nor with Massachusetts, New-York, nor any other State which gives the least countenance to slaveholding. For slaveholding lifts up the slaveholder above all the rights of human nature, and reduces the slave to a brute. Nor can it have fellowship with the selling of intoxicating drinks, since that fills the coffers of some men at the expense of sinking others below the brute.

What an enemy instead of friend of the natural and only reasonable religion, must be the religion which is in full fellowship with these unnatural and enormous crimes! Base indeed must be the religion in which there is not virtue enough to shut up the dram-shop, and to afford shelter to the pursued slave. Base indeed must it have made the people who elect Pro-slavery and dram-shop Legislatures.

We pass on to other illustrations of the spuriousness of the prevailing religion. The American Tract Society justifies its wickedness, also, on the ground of its promise to be wicked. Quite recently it has again, under the plea of its virtual promise to withhold this part of the Gospel, excused itself for refusing "to preach deliverance" to the slaves. As if a promise, be it real or pretended, express or implied, to rob the most persecuted and peeled class of men of that God's testimony for the faithful promulgation of which they are in perishing need, could excuse the robbers! And these superlatively guilty robbers carry on their robbery in the name and with the solemn air and long face of piety, and as if it were a plainly commanded and indispensable duty and service to Him who has said: "I the Lord love judgment: I hate robbery for burnt offering."

Another recent illustration of the falseness of the current religion is afforded in the almost universal sympathy with the murderer of Philip Barton Key. The secular press favored his acquittal. So did a portion of the religious press; and, so far as I know, no portion of it contended for his conviction. But why should he have been acquitted? Because, say his apologists, he was angry when he did the deed. What! the ruin of his wife beget in him the superficial and cheap emotion of anger!

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A base man, indeed, must he then be. A noble man in such circumstances would be filled, ay, he might be even killed, with grief. But the sorrow of his soul would be too deep, and would be too sacred and select, to express itself in the vulgar and brutal demonstrations of anger.

We proceed to the most relied-on and popular excuse for the murder. It is that the adulterer deserves to die. But our law does not say so. The law of Moses does, is the reply; and a great parade of it was made both in and out of the Court. So does Moses' law say that "every one who curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death." So, too, does it say that to gather sticks on the Sabbath is an offense punishable with death. And what gross inconsistency and glaring hypocrisy it is to hold up some of his laws as obligatory and to make no account of others! Moses, however, did not mean that persons should be put to death for these offenses without having first had a trial. Moreover, his code was for an ignorant and uncivilized people, and it is not for us. Christ is our lawgiver, and he confronts Moses the lawgiver. Christ, rather than have the adulterer suffer the unreasonable punishment of death, would say to him: "Go, and sin no more."

Will the defenders of this murderer stand by their doctrine that, where the law does not provide a penalty private wrath should? Then let them, as consistency and honesty require, look upon the slave, not the seduction only of whose wife and daughters, but the forcible subjection of them to lust, is among everyday actualities as well as possibilities. Let them, I say, look on him, and admit his duty to wreak the deep vengeance of his soul upon those who have trampled down his holy marital and parental rights, as well as all the other rights of his manhood.

Again, are the defenders of this doctrine and this murderer prepared to have the wife of the adulterer go forth to shoot the adulteress? They are, if they are honest and consistent. And again, would they have the seduced rather than the seducer murdered? Who knows that Key was not the seduced party? Whatever justice at this point he might have been able to do his reputation, he was not permitted to do. For he was first murdered and then tried.

Once more: Are these defenders willing that all persons who

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suspect, or, if you please, believe, that their conjugal partner is unfaithful, shall act, pistol in hand, upon the first impulses of their suspicions, or even upon their fully-matured beliefs? For surely, if this action shall be allowed to any, it must be to all. But in ten thousand cases the mind in which such suspicions spring up or such beliefs are matured, would be so swayed by ignorance, prejudice, and passion, as to be utterly incapable of weighing evidence. What, however, if it shall be even a very wise and good man who shall suspect me of a crime?—still, and even if it be a crime ever so worthy of death, I must insist on the right of being tried before I am killed.

In this new order of things, whose life is safe? Not mine; not yours. Every where there are jealous persons silly or stupid enough to be persuaded, though without any reason, of attempts to debauch their wives, or daughters, or sisters. Hence, if this tendency in our country to let the jealous man be judge, jury and executioner in his own case, shall gain as much strength in a few years to come as it has in the last few years, there will not be another country on earth where murder will be so frequent, and the life of an innocent person so insecure. If juries will help arrest the rapid progress of our nation to the lowest barbarism, they must promptly convict the class of murderers to which the murderer of Philip Barton Key belongs. As things are going, they had better let any other class of murderers escape.

But would I not look to the husband to protect the wife from sedection? No—I would look to herself. Her own virtues are her only legitimate earthly protectors from such a fate. All the aid I would require of a husband would be to live such a life before her as should minister strength to those virtues. How degrading to woman is this doctrine that blood must be shed in order to deter men from using her upon their lusts! To what a low place in the scale of intelligent beings does it consign her!

But would I not have civil government prescribe a penalty for sexual intercourse out of wedlock? Certainly I would. Its office, ay, its sole office, is to protect the great natural rights of man: and these are never more flagrantly invaded than by such intercourse. Let me here say that in no land is there civil government. Emphatically true is this in respect to our own land.

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Its place here is usurped by a bold and infamous conspiracy against human rights. God made every man to own himself. But this conspiracy which we call Government, allows one man to own another. Again, our Government, like Governments in other lands, instead of protecting life and property, licenses the dram-shop—that immeasurably greatest manufactory of madmen, murderers, and incendiaries. These are illustrative of the spuriousness of the religion which permits them. Another is to be found in land-monopoly. Government, here and elsewhere, allows one man to grasp fifty homes, and to leave thereby forty-nine men homeless. For, beside that we each need but one home, there is but one home for each of us. The defeat of the Grow-amended Land Bill in the last Congress shows that the protection of human rights, which is the great object of the true religion, is no object at all of the popular religion.

Now, it is on the very same principle on which Government should forbid land-monopoly that it should also forbid sexual intercourse out of wedlock. In other words, it should harmonize with nature and the religion of nature, and ordain that every man shall have but one wife, and every woman but one husband. But one, I repeat: for the census tables of all countries show that the sexes are substantially equal in numbers. And with this great fact in nature the teaching of Jesus agrees, when he says, "God made them male and female;" not ten women for one man, nor ten men for one woman; but one for one. On this simple ground, that nature affords but one of one sex to one of the other, should Government punish polygamy; that is, on the simple ground that for Government to allow a man to get two wives, or a woman to get two husbands, would be to allow them to rob their fellows of a great natural right—the right to a wife in the one case, and to a husband in the other. Herein, and herein only, do we see how to reach the solution of that great problem in Utah which so perplexes our statesmen — our poor statesmen who are as ignorant that all questions in the province of politics are to be solved solely in the light of the rights and wants of human nature, as are our poor theologians, that all questions in the province of religion, also, are to be solved solely in that same light.

But it may be said that my argument is against polygamy only—only against a plurality of husbands and wives. I an-

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swer that it is equally applicable to the condemnation of the licentiousness which is not practised under the name and shelter of matrimony as to that which is. Government is bound to punish the one as well as the other, for precisely the same reason and with precisely the same severity—the robbery of great natural rights being precisely the same in the one case as in the other. That it is precisely the same is obvious, from the fact that the man whose commerce is not confined to his wife, but is with other women also, robs her of a husband, inasmuch as his licentiousness disqualifies him to be a husband; and robs men of wives by disqualifying those other women to be wives. A similar robbery does the licentious woman practise upon her husband and upon her own sex.

Not very remotely connected with the questions we have just been disscussing is that of divorce. This, like the others, is very readily solved in the clear and strong light of authoritative nature. But how puzzling is the problem if we grope for its solution among the uncertain and conflicting interpretations of books! The way that this question is disposed of politically, and for the most part ecclesiastically, is but little in harmony with the teachings of nature, and is a further illustration of the worthlessness of artificial religions, and of the necessity of returning to the religion of nature and reason.

Why should people marry? Because "it is not good that the man should be alone." Because the human heart yearns for the freest communion and fullest sympathy with some other heart. Because no one is capable of going alone and uncounselled through the trials and perplexities before him; and with no bosom friend to soothe and cheer and sustain him amid the sorrows and sufferings that await him. It is for such reasons, and because joy is thereby doubled as well as pain divided, that the journey of life should be travelled in pairs—each pair being bound together in that mutual love which never wearies of its ministerings, and never forsakes its chosen companion.

Much has been said and written in our day in favor of making a physically healthy offspring the paramount object in choosing a husband or wife. But, in point of fact, it is very rarely made such; very rarely made any object whatever; and, in my judgment, should never be. I would that persons should marry each other simply because they have fallen so deeply in

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love as to feel that they must—ay, already do belong to each other; and are irrevocably chosen to care for and bless each other; and can never, while life lasts, be separated from each other. Children are to be regarded not as the direct object, but as one of the natural and unstudied incidents of marriage. I admit that when parents find themselves bringing diseased and miserable children into the world they had better lock up their faculties than multiply such children. Let me here say that it is not only probable that the child of parents, whose marriage sprang from their true love of each other and a deep soul-union with each other, is far more likely to be morally sound than the child of parents who are brought together with about the same calculation for the improvement of human stock as enters into the improvement of breeds of animals; but that it is also probable that he who was born with a poor physical constitution will be like to improve it if he have a good moral one; while he who has a poor moral one will probably be reckless of his physical constitution. Thus has a love-marriage the promise of children healthier, not only in soul, but in the end in body also. Far away, then, from marriage be all calculation. The blindest and most improvident love-match is infinitely preferable to a calculated and calculating match. A marriage, if need be, in the face of all calculation because so brimful of love—a downright can't-help-it marriage—is the true one.

In what cases would I have divorce allowed? I say, with the Catholic Church, in none. But would I not when there is adultery? No, not even then. In any case whatever, it violates great human rights. Nature, as we have seen from the census tables, does not allow it; and Jesus, far greatest of all the moral interpreters of Nature, does not. It is true that there is one offense for which he allows the husband to put away the wife; but he declares him to be guilty of adultery if he marries again. Though we are not bound to cohabit with an adulterous person, nevertheless, not even adultery breaks the tie of marriage. My wife is incapable of becoming the wife of another so long as I live. My crime may be such as to make it incompatible with her self-respect and her other duties to continue to live with me. But she is never to cease from her efforts for my reformation, and she is never to put herself in such circumstances as would disable her from receiving me, should I return to her in peni-

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tence. This, however, she clearly would do by marrying another. I know not the genius nor requirements of Christianity if it would have the wife forgive her husband when he repents of his lying or theft, and it would not also have her take him back to her arms when he has repented of his adultery.

I said that my wife ought not to marry another while I am alive; and I have already argued in effect to this conclusion. I have already virtually shown that for her to do so would be not only to wrong me but to practise a robbery upon her sex, some of whom must go unmarried if others have more than one living husband.

I said that in no case should there be divorce. Let it be understood that there can not be, and the caution in selecting a conjugal partner would be greatly increased. Moreover, there would be a fresh motive then for the seasonable healing of those dissensions in married life which are so often allowed to run on and result in mutual estrangement and divorce. But so long as the marriage knot can be untied—even though it can be by adultery only—so long will there be endeavors to untie it. The wicked wife may, for the sake of getting it untied, practise her arts to involve her husband in adultery, and the wicked husband may seek this end by similar means.

I say no more of marriage, only that if it is to be invested with far more of beauty, dignity, and solemnity, and to be made far more productive of blessedness, it must be held to be as enduring as life itself.

Thus have I set before you as far as I well could within the narrow limits of a single discourse the religion of nature. If the one great direct object of true religion is the protection of natural rights, then we must have a natural religion to accomplish it. Natural rights never have been, and never will be, protected under artificial religions; and the fact that they are cloven down the earth over, is conclusive evidence that artificial religions prevail the earth over. Friend of Temperance, friend of Peace, friend of Freedom! work on against Intoxicating Drinks, and War, and Slavery; but flatter yourselves with no hope of permanent or extensive success—until the current religion has been supplanted by the religion of nature. Seeker of reform in politics! the current religion blocks up your way also. Corrupt and crazy as are our politics, they are neverthe-

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less no worse than our religion. Nay, they are always one with it. The State is never more rotten than the Church.

We frequently hear the light of nature spoken of as dim and doubtful and deceiving. But, in point of fact, is it not the only clear and bright and sure one? Jesus himself is not another light. He is the perfect medium through which the light of nature shines. The common opinion is that nature is not a sufficient source whence to make up our religion. A much-relied-on proof that it is not, is its failure to teach the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. I admit that it does not teach it. I admit that it teaches the reverse. But this doctrine, which is of so much interest to the superstitious and speculative, natural religion has nothing at all to do with. Its only concern is to make better the moral character of men; and whether this doctrine is true or false does in no wise affect such character. But, saying nothing of his body, does nature teach that man shall live again? Unless she does, how slow should we be to believe it? A doctrine so important as another life is not to be confidently received on any less certain testimony than nature herself. Unless it is at least countenanced by nature, it should not be received at all.

I believe there are strong, I will not say conclusive, proofs in nature that man shall live again. One is, that God made him in His own likeness. That He did so, we endeavored to show in an early part of this discourse. He put into him His own spirit, and made him to be His immortal companion and co-worker. Another of these proofs is, that God made him with wants that this life can not satisfy. The horse and dog, and other creatures, whose knowledge is mainly instinctive, attain here their summit of knowledge, and therefore of enjoyment and usefulness also. But man gathers up all earthly knowledge only to long for more. The more he learns, the more unsatisfied is he with the measure of his learning; and by the very laws of his being, as they stand revealed to him in his own history and experience, he seems compelled to regard his present degrees of knowledge, and consequently of usefulness and happiness also, as but earnests of their infinite growth hereafter. The more Newton and Humboldt learned, the more they became little children; not only in the growing simplicity of their spirit, but in the conscious poverty of their knowledge. With the

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growth of their knowledge grew their sense of their ignorance; and when they came to die, the rich and deep diapason, made up of all the voices of their being and all the voices of their experience, sounded out the sweet and full assurance that they were but in the infancy of their existence, and that their death was to be not their death, but a new and nobler life.

I have but time to add, under this head, that if the spiritualists are not deceived, they have discovered another and a conclusive natural evidence that man is to live again. It may be many years, however, before the phenomena of spiritualism will be sufficiently accumulated and authenticated to establish in all minds the fact that Nature teaches another state of human existence.

Repeatedly, in this discourse, have I called the religion I am commending the religion of nature. With entire propriety I might always have called it the religion of reason, since it is reason that discerns and approves and adopts it.

I notice that my use of the word reason in former discourses on the religion of reason is criticised. My critics appear to confine the meaning of the word to ratiocination, or the process of reasoning. But does it not also mean the result arrived at through such process? The conclusion that the slave should be set free results from sound reasoning: in other words, is supported by reason, and therefore may be and is called reason. So, too, the conclusion that men should not poison and defile themselves with intoxicating liquors and tobacco is another result of sound reasoning, and comes properly under the name of reason. The right—the right as it is seen in the light of reason—is surely one of the admitted definitions of reason; and therefore have I felt justified to speak of reason as the standard with which to compare the claims of a religion. Does a religion attribute to God an arbitrary and cruel disposition?—then do I condemn it, because it wars at that essential point with reason. Does it, on the other hand, accord to Him a paternal and loving spirit?—so far, then, do I welcome it, because so far it abides the test of reason.

My efforts the last few years in behalf of the religion of reason, have been construed by many into attacks upon Christianity. Nevertheless, they were intended as an humble means toward saving it. Love to God and love to man are the essen-

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tial elements of Christianity; and as nothing can be more reasonable than these, it is impossible that reason should make war upon Christianity. More than this: the religion of reason and the Christian religion are necessarily one. I admit that the religion of reason is a different thing from the spurious Christianity which prevails in every part of Christendom. I admit that all its artillery is directed against that wicked and ruinous counterfeit. But the true Christianity—the Christianity of the Bible—the Christianity taught by the lips and life of Jesus—has no truer friend than reason. Indeed, it is alone by the force of reason, guided and blest of heaven, that a false Christianity can be beaten back from its usurpations, and the true reënthroned.

The religion of reason is indispensable, not only for the purpose of putting to flight a counterfeit, but also for the purpose of preserving the genuine Christianity, and gaining a hold for it on the public heart. It is indispensable not only to show how worthless is the Christianity which is in fellowship with slavery and the dram-shop and other abominations, but also to persuade men of the truth and preciousness of that Christianity which allies itself to no wrong, and sustains every right. To persuade them I mean, by proofs addressed to their understanding, and not by appeals to their superstitious credulity.

Because of their own deep sense of its excellence, Christians have been wont to challenge an unquestioning and unhesitating faith in their religion. They have promptly sentenced to endless woe all who dare to doubt the truth of any position of the Bible, or to call in question any of the principal ecclesiastical interpretations of it. True, many of them have acknowledged in words the right to investigate the popular views of Christianity: but with very few exceptions, they have all abjured it in practice. Even those who tolerate this investigation, do so with the understanding and advertisement that whoever shall dare come to a conclusion opposite their own, will, for a daring so wicked, merit everlasting punishment. But the growing intelligence of mankind will not much longer consent to repose a blind faith in the best religion. It will soon insist that even such a religion must be more than alleged—must be proved—to be true, before men will be bound to believe in it. In the ages of superstition, and in the subsequent ages of speculation,

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through which nations pass, a religion does not need to be backed with logic in order to gain currency even with the intelligent. But Christendom has now become so philosophical and practical that nothing except religion can longer pass in it without proof; and before many years more shall have elapsed there will be no longer even this exception.

By the way, this assuming the truth of Christianity as the churches and their members do, is not, as they suppose it to be, honoring Christianity. It is dishonoring it. Truth is honored not by a blind assent to her claims, but by that acquiescence in them which she wins from those who faithfully investigate them. The Bible is insulted by being assumed to be true, but honored by those who think its claims upon their faith worthy to be investigated.

Our claim of superiority for this age will be admitted only with qualifications. Our superiority in general science will be admitted, but not in the science of religion. Is not, however, the delusion as great as it is common, that the one gets ahead of the other? As a general proposition the one always keeps pace with the other. Do you say that France, while on the one hand making rapid progress in general science, has on the other become infidel? I admit it, especially in respect to the intellectual portion of her people. But I claim that her infidelity proves her great progress toward the true religion; for it proves that she is passing out of the superstitious and speculative ages that every nation will yet pass out of, and that she can no longer be satisfied with religions that claim faith without making good their claim. Her call now is for a religion which can be proved to be true; and, unhappily, her belief to a very great extent is that Christianity can not be proved to be true. Such, also, is the call, and to such an extent the unhappy belief of Italy and of some of the German States. Such, too, of vast numbers in England and America, who, in common with vast numbers in other lands, have either become, or always were infidels. But while we rejoice in their escape from the superstitious and visionary, we are nevertheless not blind to their mistake—their great and lamentable mistake—that Christianity can not be proved to be true. What if the churches and priesthood do assume the truth of it, and do virtually forbid the bringing forth of its legitimate and conclusive proofs? Nevertheless the

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proofs exist, and the religion of reason will take them up and use them to the scattering of all skepticism, and to the sure and successful planting of the blessed faith in the waste places and fallow grounds of infidelity. The religion of reason will prove that nature teaches love to God and love to man, justice and mercy, and all the elements of Christianity, and that, therefore, Christianity is true. Or, to use another form of statement, the religion of reason will show that Christianity is true by showing that Jesus was, as we have already said, the true moral interpreter of nature.

Such will be the service that the religion of reason will render to Christianity. Of boundless importance, however, as this service will be, it will nevertheless be but an incidental one. The direct object—the sole aim—of the religion of reason is: First, to convince every man that his reason is to be allowed (for his reason alone is authorized) to decide what shall be his conduct and character; and, second, to keep him by means of his own strength and of all the aids of heaven and earth in a state of unswerving fidelity to this high conviction and all its just requirements. God speaks in His creation and providence. Jesus speaks as "never man spake." His ministry will never cease to pour forth a flood of light. The great and good men and women of every age contribute their measures of enlightenment. But these are all voices for the ear of reason; and not one of them—no, not even that of the Great God—has a right to be heard in the sanctuary of the soul except through the influence of such voice upon the reason. I have been wont to say that the reason of man is the voice of God within him. If this is not literally true, nevertheless that God's voice reaches him through his reason is literally true. Save that which lies through our reason-wrought convictions, there is not for the Church, nor for the Priesthood, nor for the Bible, any road to those sacred chambers where the mind, under its sole responsibility, because sole master of itself, forms its judgments and comes to its decisions. It is God himself who has ordained this supremacy of reason; and not to acknowledge this supremacy, constantly and practically and gratefully, is to be guilty of rebelling against His government. It is God himself who has made the bringing of all our appetites, passions and pursuits into quick and glad subjection to our reason, the great law of

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our nature; and therefore not to obey this law is to prove ourselves traitors to our own nature.

Yet awhile, the religion of reason will continue to be derided and hated. But it will be neither discouraged nor impatient. It will be of good cheer and bide its time. Yet awhile, superstition, bigotry, and prejudice will continue to darken men's minds, and corrupt their hearts, and indispose them to the reign of reason. But the fallacy and failure of every religion which does not make its appeal to reason, become every day more and more manifest; and thus every day is the way becoming clearer and easier for the progress of the religion of reason. It may not soon prevail, but it surely will prevail. Linger however it may, the day will yet dawn when men the earth over will believe that they must let their reason rule them in all things, especially in religion. It will yet be acknowledged that the most reason-ruled man is the most religious man—that to be reasonable is the highest possible attainment: nay, that reason —clear, sound, right reason—is itself religion—the highest and truest religion. But dawn that day when it may, not till then will man become what his Maker made him to be, for not till then will he realize and verify his own grand nature. Not till he shall study to mould himself after the standards and ideals of reason will his life and character be such as to prove to the universe that God made him but "little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor."

Do you ask how we shall attain to an understanding of the duties of the religion of reason? I answer by living reasonably. Jesus teaches that the doctrines of God are to be learned by doing the will of God. A similar rule applies in the present similar case. We must not act unreasonably, as do the sectarians—for they organize parties with the *intent* of excluding from them the friends of Christ. As if the friends of Christ could be excluded without his being excluded also! We must not act unreasonably, as do the temperance societies, which will one day denounce the selling of intoxicating drinks as the blackest crime, and will the next use their machinery and members to elect men whose official powers are employed to whitewash this blackest crime and screen it from punishment. Nor must we act unreasonably, as do the Abolitionists, who, though declaring Slavery to be the superlative piracy, do nevertheless

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elect men who honor it as law, and thereby give to it their official and sustaining sanction. He is in effect a Pro-Slavery man and not an Abolitionist, who does not hold slavery to be an outlaw, and does not confine his votes to such candidates as hold likewise. Nor must we act unreasonably, as do those clergymen who on one occcasion pour out unmeasured execrations upon slavery, and upon another virtually recall and sadly neutralize them by fellowshipping as Christians, and by honoring with their love and commending with their confidence, clergymen who are the most notorious and wicked defenders of slavery. Nor must we act unreasonably, as does that large class of professing Christians who, though recognizing themselves to be "the temple of God," and often praying to be cleansed "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," are, notwithstanding, guilty of defiling body and soul with rum, tobacco, or opium.

In all respects and all relations we must act reasonably, if we would see most clearly and learn most fully what *the* one true religion—the religion of nature or reason—calls for. Such reasonable acting will of itself reveal the duties that lie all along our path, and make that path "as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

But is reason sufficient for all these things? It is. Not, however, unless the Divine influence upon it be unceasing. Man, as much as the planet, needs to be set in motion, and kept in motion by God. Vain is an enlightened reason, unless there be also the God-given spirit of submission to its control. Vain is it that man is made with ability to will and to do, unless he allow his Maker to work in him to will and to do. Vain all his physical, mental, moral powers if he let not Heaven dispose him to put them to a heavenly use. Vain, in a word, is the earthly existence of man unless he shall be born again. But, blessed be God, all the heaven-wrought changes of spirit, purpose, life, which are denoted by the figure of the new birth, and which every man must experience in order to be saved, lie within the reach of every man. If any are left unholy, it is because they refuse to be made holy. If any are cut off from the overflowing fountain of impartial love and free salvation, it is because they cut themselves off from it.

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LETTER TO MR. GOODELL.

PETERBORO, August, 13, 1859.

REV. WM. GOODELL,

MY OLD AND DEAR FRIEND: I have read your letter in the *New-York Tribune* of 9th inst.; and I beg you to believe that it is from no want of respect for you that I refrain from attempting a reply to its arguments. You know that I honor and love you greatly.

Whether it be owing to the lack of lucidness in my Discourse, or to your being excited and discomposed when reading it, so it is that you have mistaken its positions, misconceived its tenor, and drawn a picture of it which bears no resemblance to the original. This being so, it devolves on me no more than on any other person, to reply to your arguments. That you have thus misapprehended and misrepresented the Discourse, will be obvious even to yourself, when you shall have again read, and with more care and composure, those portions of it to which I will now proceed to refer you.

1st. You understand me to ignore the offices of conscience and faith in religion, and to hold that reason is the only faculty to be employed in it. But the doctrine of my Discourse is, that in religion as well as in other things, reason should guide our faculties. To guide them is surely not all one with excluding them. I am not to be charged with denying the necessity of faith, when I affirm that all religious faith which is not based on reason, is but superstition and delusion. I would say here, that I am amazed that William Goodell can argue from the confiding look of the infant, or from any thing else, or that he can in the least degree believe, that faith in God can precede the exercise of reason. I did not suppose that such a dream could impose on such an intellect. I feel now more than ever how urgent is the necessity of preaching the Religion of Reason.

2d. You understand me to say that the sun, stars, and earth are the only sources of religious knowledge. But do I not add

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